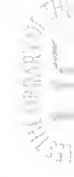


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THE LAST SENTENCE

A NOVEL

BY

MAXWELL GRAY

AUTHOR OF

'THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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THE LAST SENTENCE

PART III.—Continued.

CHAPTER IV.

LOST.

THERE followed then a time of great happiness, a long flight of sunny, summer days, each bequeathing as it passed fresh strength to the two weak creatures with whose lives Cecil's heart was bound up—a second honeymoon containing fresh elements of happiness unknown in the first.

The long vacation had arrived, so there was nothing to call him away from Cynthia, who was now able to sit out of doors under the cedars, pale and wasted, yet looking quite herself, and half amused

at her husband's skilful and tender handling of the little Cecilia.

‘Never in my wildest dreams did I picture you dandling a girl-baby,’ she said, one bright day ; ‘you always had such a horror of babies. Nature is indeed strong.’

‘Ah, but this little thing cost me so dear,’ he replied ; ‘and, then, I had to be both father and mother to her.’ A dark flush went over his face as he spoke, and his brows knit at some thought his words had evoked.

‘You must not expect it again, Cynthia,’ said Lady Susan, who was sitting at work in the cedar shadows. ‘It is the first, remember ; that is all the charm. The General was never tired of wondering at our first baby’s perfections, but he scarcely seemed conscious of the existence of the others until they were old enough to speak. I believe he occasionally was known to ask if the reigning baby was a girl or a boy, and never remembered which.’

‘Well, is the poor little beggar to learn Sanskrit or Hebrew first?’ asked the General, who had just driven over from Cottesloe to fetch his wife. ‘The last time I came, your ladyship, they were disputing about when it should begin Greek.’

But Cynthia was impervious to sarcasm. ‘She certainly will have a taste for music; see how she is listening to that robin,’ she said, looking gravely at the small object of the discussion, which lay cradled on its father’s left arm, staring solemnly up at the dark cedar boughs, with one mottled fist fumbling at its mouth and the other closed round Cecil’s forefinger, while it emitted occasional grunts and gurgles, supposed by its mother to express admiration and joy.

Stabs of self-reproach were piercing the heart against which the small soft babe was so warmly nestled. Her father was thinking of that other earlier baby that had never been thus cradled and cherished. Yet that first little daughter had been a pretty,

lusty babe with never an ailment or defect, not puny and ailing like this one. And it was motherless now and left to strangers; he had not seen it for months. And yet the more this little Cecilia twined herself about his heart-strings, the more did he find himself thinking of the little disowned daughter. What had that poor innocent done that no father's arms should shelter it? It was equally his own, lawfully born child, of his own blood, though undesired—the child of the unloved. Well, he would go and see Cécile that very day, he decided, as he rose and took his father away with him to discuss the cutting of some timber, the child still on his arm, where it was usually quiet. He had become so accustomed to the light warm burden that he missed it when it was away; he read and wrote, walking up and down his study, thinking deeply and consulting authorities on the bookshelves, all with the small baby tucked up on his arm.

‘How good he is!’ Cynthia said, looking

after him with a happy, languid sigh, as he disappeared among the trees.

‘My dear, it is quite ideal,’ Lady Susan replied; ‘it is as refreshing as it is rare.’

‘How thankful I ought to be!’ added Cynthia. ‘I have not the shadow of a thought I cannot share with him, and I know he has none he does not share with me. I am glad to have been ill; for I was too happy. Now I know at least what bodily pain means—and even sorrow—for I was grieved to think of leaving you all, especially him. I was telling him only to-day of something that haunted me when I seemed to be passing away. It was the face of that poor girl in the snow at Cottesloe. I kept thinking how glad I was to have you all near me, and how desolate she must have been, dying all alone, with no creature near her, and in a foreign country. Pascal said “*Je mourrai seul*,” but that seems to me the acme of desolation.’

‘He did not mean “untended”; he meant that a soul passes solitary to the

hereafter, though, indeed, it may not be so. But we have to do with living, not dying. I wonder how that poor little Cécile is going on.'

'I will ask Cecil. He said when last we spoke of her that the child was happy and well. Mrs. Barnes is fond of her—just the woman to have charge of her. I wonder how many young men would concern themselves about a little foundling as my husband does? And he has so many interests and tastes; his life is so full and intellectual; he is so much courted and liked. It is not as if he were a tepid, fireside, half-vitalized man, with weak tea instead of blood in his veins. To think of a man so gifted and sought after spending his days and nights in nursing a sick wife and ailing baby!'

'But it must not go on, Cynthia. Cecil cannot always indulge in this excessive domesticity, delightful though it is.'

'You need have no fear. I should not like a husband tied to my apron-strings. My Hercules shall never handle a distaff.'

Oh, I have great ambition for Cecil !' replied Cynthia, flushing in her weakness, while her eyes, larger and brighter since her illness, showed dark and dewy with too quick feeling.

'She thinks she feels for him as his mother does,' Lady Susan mused ; 'but she never "groaned for him." Yet the child is a mother herself.' Then she sighed ; her beautiful dark eyes grew wistful as she thought of the great and unusual happiness that had befallen these two young people.

Cecil rode into Southford that very afternoon, reproaching himself on the way for not having found time to visit his little daughter when he came down at Easter. He had last seen her at Christmas, which he spent at Swanbourne, and now it was the end of August. His mind was running upon girls' education. He reasoned about the proper balance to be held between mental and physical development. All the mistakes in female education from the beginning of the world till now were to be

avoided in rearing little Cecilia, whose life he saw clearly marked out before him, and who already in his imagination rode with a light hand and perfect seat by his side, a slim girl with floating hair, on a pony for one half-mile, a graceful young woman on a lady's hunter for another.

She must on no account be bookish ; she must learn chiefly by observation and converse with cultured minds. How old must she be before her opening intelligence and fresh innocence would make her the most delightful and inspiring companion on earth next to her mother ? Then came the doctor's warnings about her extreme delicacy and his doubts of her growing up, except with the greatest care, then the reflection that all that wealth and science could do for her would be done. Cécile, luckily, would need less care ; the Breton peasant strain would stand her in good stead. He had always intended to send her to a first-rate school, as soon as her age permitted, and had been fully alive to the necessity of placing her with ladies ;

but those intentions had been vague and far-off before the warm feelings awakened by this precious child of his love had stirred him to a deeper sense of duty towards her sister.

Underlying these sharpened feelings of responsibility to the unacknowledged Cécile, there may have been some unconscious apprehension lest any failure in duty to the unloved might be scourged through the beloved, some vague notion of winning favour of Heaven for the one by doing rightly by the other. Yet children trotting by the wayside, darting out from cottages and running under his horse's feet, acquired a new interest in his eyes, because of that very small baby at home, while the repugnance approaching to hatred with which the elvish Cécile, with her sphinx-like face, had inspired him, was now softened into a great pity. He remembered that her eyes were fine, and began to hope she would grow more attractive and develop some childish graces that would win people's hearts.

He might secure Mrs. Barnes as Cécile's permanent attendant, not to deprive the lonely child of her one friend, and place the two at once in some refined home, with a childless young married lady, the wife of some clergyman or country doctor. Then Cécile could spend her holidays with him, while she would be a playmate for Cecilia, and finally might take her natural place as his adopted daughter at his own fireside. The similarity of names was unfortunate, but unavoidable. His name had come to him through a Lady Cecilia, aunt and godmother, who naturally wished to have some part in his eldest child ; moreover, Cynthia's heart was set upon the name and he could not vex her by refusing it ; besides, there was no time for consideration, the little thing having been privately baptized soon after its birth.

Putting up his horse, he walked through the streets that had seen Renée's deep sorrow and looked with such unfamiliar faces upon her grief on that last sad day of

her life. He stopped outside a shop, the windows of which were beset by a group of admiring children, and listened to hear what was most attractive to them before going in and filling his pockets with bonbons. Then he gratified his new child-love by giving those outsiders leave to order what they liked ; he had given Cécile neither sweets nor toys before. In like manner he stood among a small crowd before a fascinating toy-shop, the smell of which awakened long-dormant memories of happiness ; after all, he had lost much by exiling his first little daughter from his heart. Who is too old or too forgetful to feel a quickened heart-throb at the magic odour of painted tin and wood and wax and childhood that lives about a toy-shop?

Well provided with munitions of war to besiege the citadel of Cécile's tiny heart, he reached Mrs. Barnes's door, and blushed for the meanness of the small tenement he had thought good enough for his daughter's home. The one window next the door

was hermetically closed and blocked up by gaily-blooming geraniums and fuchsias ; coarse white curtains nearly meeting behind these further blocked air and light from the small room. It was not the most pleasant and healthful dwelling for a young child, though children swarmed in that street, on doorsteps, in gutters, at windows, lusty of lung, if not delightful of manner. The street was narrow ; it was close and stuffy, though the afternoon was breezy. Smuts pervaded the atmosphere ; a harsh-voiced woman was frantically scolding a shrieking child, to the accompaniment of dull thuds, in one house ; some boys were quarrelling, with shrill oaths and foul words, on the hot pavement ; a forlorn baby was screaming in a dirty and abandoned perambulator ; a man with a barrow was calling ‘ Plum ry-eeep ! apple ry-eeep ! ’ as he passed slowly along the narrow road ; a barrel-organ was droning near ; the dull street, little frequented and devoid of shops, had an air of squalid respectability.

He knocked a second time, recognising the black lion's head on the knocker as a familiar and unpleasant acquaintance. The dull thuds, interspersed with a woman's exasperated shouts and a child's shrill, frightened cries and convulsive sobs, were again heard in the next house; the thought struck cold to his heart that Cécile might be treated in that fashion—it was only the discipline usual in such households—it might be the child herself who was crying. At this thought he applied the knocker in a way that called half the people in the street to their windows, but the windows in this house were fast closed. Cécile should not stay a moment longer to be beaten. He found the door fast on turning the handle and shaking it. The house was like a prison; what a place to cage a little child in on that breezy summer day!

Steps were heard at last; the door was unlocked and cautiously and slowly opened some three inches, disclosing the head of an unknown woman, with hastily pinned-

up hair, a shawl drawn over her shoulders, and a shininess due to freshly applied soap on her face.

‘Is Mrs. Barnes in?’ he asked of the wondering woman, who was annoyed at being interrupted in her toilet.

‘No such name. Wrong house,’ she replied, shutting the door again, yet not so quickly but that he caught it and pushed it back.

‘This is 37, Mrs. Barnes’s house,’ he said. ‘Where is Mrs. Barnes? She cannot have moved, surely.’

‘This yer’s my house,’ replied the woman snappishly. ‘No Mrs. Barnes here, nor never was.’

‘How long have you lived in this house, my good woman?’

‘Good woman yerself! I’ve lived here so long as I’d a mind to, and always kept respectable. I haven’t got no Mrs. Barneses on the premises, and don’t want to have no such rubbish.’

‘Come, come now! Why not answer a civil question? When had you first a mind

to live in No. 37, ma'am, if you would be so good as to tell me ?'

'We came in Midsummer Day,' she grumbled, darkly scowling, and still holding the door ready to shut it.

'And who had the house before you took it ?'

'Name of Jones, gas-fitter with a young family. They tore up the skirting for fire-wood.'

Then the door was suddenly slammed and locked, and a woman from an adjoining house, who had been listening, came up.

'That's poor stuff in No. 37, sir,' she said. 'She's a stranger in these parts. Mrs. Barnes you was pleased to ask for ; she died in the spring, sir.'

'She had a little girl with her ?'

'Yes, sir—a nurse-child. The mother was found dead in the snow. When Mrs. Barnes was ill the child was took away. Mrs. Barnes, she wasn't hardly fit to do with children. She was getting in years ; she always kep' herself very much to herself, to be sure. Her daughters was

the same. Many a time I've a-thought a gentleman like General Marlowe might have put the child with a more capabler woman. There she'd stay, poor little heart! on that there doorstep hours together, looking that old-fashioned and moping. She was kep' clean, I will say that. And she had enough to eat. I've offered her bread-and-butter many a time, and she hadn't seemed to want none. But it was nothing but right they should take her away, for a little child do want looking after more than just food and clothes.'

'But who took her away?' he asked.

'Well, there, that's more than anybody here can say, sir. For Mrs. Barnes never told anybody. She laid weeks and weeks out of sense, and her daughters that come to look after her they never said where the little girl was, they was that close. But everybody thought the Marlowes took it away, as was only natural when there was nobody to look after it.'

No more information was to be obtained from the neighbours except the names of

the doctor who attended the dead woman and the minister whose chapel she frequented.

Having secured these names, Cecil went to the office of the solicitors who gave Mrs. Barnes her monthly payments for the child, and asked when the last payment had been made.

None had been made since June, he was told. None of the people Mrs. Barnes had sent with signed receipts for the money had applied since nearly two months ago.

He asked to see the last half-year's receipts; they were all in the same handwriting, but had been presented by different people at different times, sometimes by children.

'Mrs. Barnes's signature is well known here?' he asked.

'Certainly,' the clerk replied. 'We had no hesitation in giving the money to her messengers.'

'She died in the spring. These last receipts must be forgeries. It is not

difficult to forge such a signature as that,' he said, pointing to the laborious pot-hooks in which the short name was traced.

The doctor, whom he next visited, was aware that Mrs. Barnes had a young child in her care ; he had recommended it to be removed at the beginning of the illness. The daughters had agreed to this, and the child had been sent away, he did not know where ; he had supposed it to be a grandchild ; he did not remember that the young woman found in the snow had left a child with Mrs. Barnes. A son had visited the sick woman ; he came from Surrey ; his address was unknown. One of the daughters was in service ; the other was married and lived at Plymouth—or was it Portsmouth ?—address unknown.

‘But why distress yourself, Mr. Marlowe? The child would not have been taken except by people who wanted her ; she is secure of maintenance and affection. I wish I had known that you were interested in these people. I would have written to you at once.’

The minister did not even know that there was a child in the house; he had been told that the woman let lodgings, and had heard, but since forgotten, about the lodger found in the snowdrift. He did not visit Mrs. Barnes in her last illness; she was too ill for religious 'exercises.'

'Cecil!' his wife exclaimed on his return that evening. 'Dearest, are you ill?'

'No, no,' he replied, a sombre fire glowing in the eyes that met hers a moment and then fell. 'No; but,' with a long sigh, 'I have lost little Cécile.'

'Lost her? Cecil!'

'But,' she said, when she had heard the history of the child's disappearance to the end, 'you must have seen her since last Christmas. You gave me good accounts of her. I supposed that you were in constant communication with the child or her attendant.'

'Oh, call me a blackguard at once, and have done with it!' he cried savagely.

A painful silence followed; a dark flush spread over Cecil's downcast face; Cynthia

felt an indescribable misery and humiliation. She blushed hotly.

‘Surely, dear,’ she said very gently after a while, ‘the child must have fallen into kind hands. Those who took her must have meant well; she was too young to be of the smallest use.’

But he thought of a man he had recently defended on the charge of decoying from her home and murdering a little girl of three or four years old.

His father had no comfort for him. ‘It was a grave charge. You should not have left her to others,’ he said; ‘you were responsible. And I don’t see how you are to act if you do find her. You have no claim to the custody of this child.’

‘The child must be found, Bob,’ he said to his faithful servant; ‘I shall never have a happy hour until I see her.’

‘Certainly, sir. I wish you’d passed the word to me before to keep an eye on her, that’s all.’

‘I wish to heaven I had! But it is too late, too late!’

‘Not but what she’s right enough in somebody’s hands,’ Bob added. ‘Nobody wouldn’t hurt a little girl like that. Then, sir, you’ve no claim to her.’

‘Ah, but I have!’

‘Well there, Mr. Cecil, sir! ’Tisn’t for the likes of me to think, but I had my thoughts, sir, as soon as I seen that young woman.’

‘She was my wife, Bob. I thought her dead till that day on the ice.’

‘Oh, Lord!’

‘I trust you, Bob, as I have trusted no one. My wife knows nothing.’

‘Then, sir, she ought to. You may depend upon that.’

‘Find the child, Bob—find the child! That is all I ask of you.’

But the child was never found.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

THE puny baby, whose birth had cost her parents so dear, grew into a pretty, intelligent child, fragile but not sickly, and twined herself daily closer and closer about her father's heart. A boy was born when little Cissie was beginning to make some bewitching attempts at talking, but ' 'ickle budder,' as she called him, was regarded by Cecil chiefly in the light of a playmate for Cissie, whose devoted slave the sturdy little fellow subsequently became. Other children followed ; each welcome, but none ever touching the father's heart as that frail first blossom of love and heavy sorrow had done.

He was too just to make any difference between the children, and only his wife and his mother saw the light that came to his eyes when they rested on Cissie, and heard the peculiar note of tenderness in every word addressed to that child of his heart.

A frequent little cough to which she was subject affected him like physical pain. 'That cough stabs me !' he burst out one night to Cynthia, who assured him that it was nothing. The vaguest rumours of infantile maladies in the neighbourhood filled him with terror and made him send her away post-haste.

'I really believe, Cecil,' his mother once said, 'that you would gladly see every one of the others down in the measles if only Cissie might be spared.'

'That I would,' he replied fervently ; 'they are such hardy little things,' he added, laughing.

'I wonder that Cynthia is not jealous,' she said. 'We are both expecting to

hear that Cissie is to go on circuit with you before long.'

'And why not? There is more wit in that little head than in the whole of the Bench and the Bar put together.'

'Of course excepting Mr. Cecil Marlowe, Q.C.'

Cissie was one of those imaginative children who are always startling, delighting, and horrifying their elders by their sayings. 'When I was a little bird,' was a frequent prelude to a long, long story, the pure and sudden fiction of Cissie's small brain, which was more active than was good for health.

'And when were you a little bird, Cissie?' her father would ask, lifting the fairy-like form in his arms and bending the tender radiance of his large dark eyes upon her till she seemed to be steeped, and quickened in it, like a flower in sunshine.

'When?' the small elf would reply with a wicked twinkle in the bright eyes; 'why *then*!' And when gently rebuked and told

that was no fit answer, she would burst into a little musical, merry laugh that no mortal could resist, and, throwing her thin arms round his neck and showering kisses upon him, would say, 'Funny, funny father! Why, don't you remember, darling? Then how *can* Cissie?'

'I had a little sister once,' she began one day, after the accustomed prelude from her nest in Cecil's arms; 'her name was Cissie, too. She was a poor little Cissie, because her father didn't love *her*——'

'Cissie!' cried Cecil, violently agitated.

'Yes,' she continued gravely, 'it was vewy, vewy sad; sometimes I cwy all night long about it,' with a deep, deep sigh.

'Nonsense, dear; that is not true,' he remonstrated.

'Oh yes, it is! It was when I was a little bird: mother knows,' she replied with her pretty laugh. After this she was always referring to 'the other Cissie, the poor Cissie, whose father didn't love her,' delighting to contrast her happy self with

an imaginary unhappy self, lacking all that she had, and even shedding tears of luxurious self-pity over the spectre of her imagination.

‘But where is the other Cissie, the poor Cissie?’ she would suddenly begin of a stormy night, when the children were gathered round the fire after dinner for ten minutes’ chat or fairy tale with father and mother. ‘*Poor* Cissie!—no father, no fire, no nothing.’

‘She inherits her father’s talents and her mother’s wickedness,’ Cynthia would sometimes say, and it was difficult to decide which parent she most resembled in face—a fact that endeared her all the more to both, as a living symbol of their union.

They were fully agreed on the duty of personally educating their children. No deputy, they argued, could replace father and mother in forming children’s minds and manners, nor could any duty be more sacred or any responsibility more serious than a parent’s. Hence these children

entered more into their parents' daily lives than is usual in their class, though they did not, as Lady Susan suggested, actually go on circuit with their father.

The pleasant May time had come round again, and the Marlowes were spending Whitsuntide at Swanbourne. Cissie was a sweet little fairy of nine, with a pale face, quickly and delicately flushed by exercise and emotion, and eyes that promised to develop the rare and spiritual charm of Cynthia's. She was gathering cowslips with the help of her devoted henchman, Charlie, and a younger boy. Cynthia, pensive, but sweet as ever, was slowly walking through the pleasant meads, while her little ones frolicked about her. Years had touched her lightly ; the fulness of life had deepened and developed the charm and power of her always sweet face and mysterious eyes. The lovely hints and suggestions in the girl's face had become noble realities in the woman's ; she was approaching the age of physical perfection, an epoch that usually precedes the

mental, as the blossom goes before the fruit and the natural before the spiritual.

She sat on the turfy slope of the down which rose, a barrier to salt sea-winds, between Swanbourne and the hushed sea, that was chafing in a subdued continuous roar at the caverned bases of the sheer chalk cliffs. This soft sea-song made pleasant concert with the children's pure flute tones and the myriad bird-notes of the May time ; spring air and sunshine, young verdure, flowers and childhood, were all around, a fit setting for Cynthia's culminating womanhood.

The children brought cowslips and heaped them upon her, talking and laughing in their happy cooing voices, while she made ball after ball for them.

‘ Mother, mother, one ball more, just one for baby ! ’ the little things shouted, flushed with laughter and the blows of flower-balls, their merry faces upturned to the mother's sweet and tender gaze. Then the deep, mysterious eyes would take on a deeper charm, and, with a caress or gentle

rebuke, the mother's slim fingers would again patiently range cowslip heads on the string till another fragrant ball was made and dashed in the children's flower-like faces with renewed laughter and happy cries. While she sat thus, beneath the clear May sky, buried in her children's flowers, with spring-music ringing in her ears, on the very spot where she had sat dreaming on that long-past May day when Cecil leaped suddenly over the stile into her dream and her life, she thought and thought-of past dreams and present fulfilment; tears gathered slowly in her eyes and fell on the flowers, a costly dew, sparkling diamond-like in the sunshine.

Was she unhappy that the slow, cold tears of keen heart-sorrow should gather unnoticed in the eyes Cecil had loved and hymned with such deep and tender devotion? What could woman desire that was not hers? Her pleasant home lay lovely among its trees in the lovely light before her; wealth and health, leisure and many

friends, were hers in the heyday of her life; the children of her love were laughing round her; the husband of her youth, the lover of her choice, was hers; he still loved her—at least she hoped so—after ten years of married life; yet it was he who brought those tears to her eyes from the very depths of her heart. She still remembered his sonnet:

‘Should sorrow cloud the sweetest, sunniest eyes
That ever looked from gentle lady’s face?’

All was vanity and mocking illusion; the soul-union, the sweet converse of mind with mind of which she had dreamed could never be. Sympathy in tastes and pursuits, mutual love, common interests, common cares, loves and sorrows—nothing could bridge the gulf between these two human beings who sat at the same hearth. She could not say why; the thought was too dark; a loyal wife must be blind—deliberately, carefully blind; yet the dark thought would intrude, strings of linked evidence would flash together with electric vividness at times.

If he would but admit her to his confidence — no matter how dark that confidence might be — but he shut her out expressly, strenuously, fearfully ; there was even suspicion and terror between them—deadly terror of some blinding truth suddenly flashing out. What bitter burden did her beloved bear about, lonely and unsolaced, on his heart ? She could in part divine only too well, in spite of her chosen blindness, for, from the day of that little child's disappearance the black shadow had risen between them, growing and growing, until the estrangement had become absolute and had even flamed up into fire of spoken anger. Would it one day be hatred ? she wondered shudderingly ; that seemed possible in the light of recent events ; hatred on his part, on hers never. ‘ He cannot understand what a love like mine is,’ she reflected, bending to set a child's disordered dress straight. ‘ It can bear all things, and hope all things. If he would but trust me ! And his very silence perhaps makes me wrong him. One

word from you might put things in such a different light, Cecil, *my* Cecil !

There were times when she felt that she must dare everything and rise up and say to him, 'What have you done that you fear to meet your own wife's eyes?' There was nothing she could not pardon, deeply as she valued her husband's honour and integrity. Had it come to this in nine years of withheld confidence, that she must substitute pity and pardon for love and honour?

About this time a room having to be redecorated, had just been thoroughly turned out ; Cecil had used it as a study for some years, and then, finding another room more convenient, had abandoned it to other uses. Finally, Cynthia had fancied the sunny morning-room, and written and worked in it. So it happened that certain fixed drawers below bookcases had in turn held papers belonging to both husband and wife. Cynthia had devoted a morning to looking through and sifting a long-accumulated mass of papers ; letters

from forgotten correspondents were there ; loose leaves and torn half-sheets, all kinds of rubbish, had crept in from time to time. Amongst these she found a time-stained sheet, detached in such a manner that she thought it reserved for some especial purpose and therefore read it carefully. It had neither signature nor address, so that it might have been part of a letter either to her husband or herself ; it was probably the middle sheet of a long letter, and was written on foreign note-paper in an unformed hand.

‘ What can this be, Cecil ? ’ she asked of her husband, who just then looked in. ‘ It reads like a love-letter ; but how could it come among our papers ? No ; it is a wife’s letter ’ (cruel distinction unconsciously drawn). ‘ Can it be an old bit of evidence in some case you have defended ? Evidently an injured wife. She is learning diligently that she may not shame him ; she is French, too—Cecil ! ’

The letter was in fifty pieces ; it had been snatched from her hand with a sub-

dued cry. Cecil was white to the lips, his eyes blazed, he was shaking with strong passion—whether fury, hatred, or terror, it was hard to tell.

Some words fell sharply on her pained ear ; their meaning never reached her sense, the tone cut too deeply into her heart. She made no reply, but looked up into eyes aflame with what seemed hate and was fury. He shrank from the glance, turned abruptly and left her.

The children were present when they met again, so that the ordinary tone of conversation had to be taken up. Cecil avoided being alone with her for a day or two, and thus the matter blew over without explanation, leaving, as such things do, a wound that would not heal. Each thought to have incurred the other's anger : Cecil dared not face an explanation ; Cynthia feared to increase the irritation the most distant approach to one evoked from him. And she sometimes had a darker fear, that of an explanation which might shadow her whole life ; in the silence of her own

heart she often repeated the cry of their wedding-eve : ' Let me be blind, Cecil, *my Cecil !* '

From this date, all those small endearments, which are as the breath of life to women and as less than nothing to men, ceased. Cecil became painfully polite : he never forgot to open a door for her, she never dared offer him a caress ; their conversation lost its inward and intimate tone.

Sometimes she tried to comfort herself with the thought that this was but the usual course of things ; that a husband's love rarely lasts beyond a twelvemonth ; that the utmost to be hoped by a reasonable woman after the inevitable fading of the first glow of romance is a tranquil friendship based upon respect, necessity, and habit ; that it was part of the general hardness of a woman's lot to endure this never-satisfied longing to love and to be loved. ~ Again she would ask herself what friendship could exist without mutual confidence ? Then her

heart would ache and ache, till she thought it must break at last.

Cecil, in the meantime, threw himself more and more into intellectual and professional pursuits. His great work, the codifying of that chaos of precedent, opinion, and statute piled on contradictory statute, which is English law, went steadily on: it was Cynthia's one great consolation that she was permitted to help in it. She sometimes startled her husband's legal friends by her knowledge of professional subjects, when these were discussed in her presence. 'Oh, Mrs. Marlowe,' an eminent Q.C. once said, 'you would not make a good judge; you know far too much law.'

Then he took up politics, and after one or two lost battles entered Parliament; but a political crisis bringing about an appeal to the country a year or two later, he was not re-elected.

One day Cynthia awoke to the conviction that Cissie was a woman—Cissie who

was only born, as it seemed, the other day. Charlie was at Oxford, the others were leaving childhood behind. The General had passed tranquilly away some years back ; Lady Susan was a beautiful old lady, quieting gradually down to the end, yet still full of intellect and life. Mr. Justice Marlowe, one of the youngest judges her Majesty ever made, had just returned from circuit, and was taking his autumn holiday tranquilly under the Swanbourne lime-trees ; his dark hair was touched with gray, but his tall spare figure was erect as ever, and his eyes had even more fire than in his youth.

Charlie, full of the newest and most superior Oxford notions, was holding forth that afternoon, as ardent youth can hold forth in the family circle. Sir Cecil, with Cissie on his arm, came to the end of a stroll under the cedars, and listened, with tolerant amusement and the subtle smile that had become subtler and sterner with years, to the lucubrations of his son and heir. This learned youth sat with his

arms crossed on the back of a chair, facing his mother and grandmother, who were sitting in the cedar shadows, Cynthia busy with her needle.

Twenty years had woven some scarcely perceptible threads of silver into her hair, and increased the singular beauty of her eyes ; the years had given her dignity and calm without taking away grace and sparkle ; her mouth, though sweeter than ever, had a sorrowful droop at the corners ; there was a wistful patience in her gentle face that went to people's hearts, even while they asked themselves what mortal woman could desire that Lady Marlowe had not. This wistfulness was now lost in the gentle malice with which she was letting fly a shaft of satire against her son's brand-new Oxford mail. Cecilia, tall and slender, laughed and pressed her delicate cheek against her father's arm ; the younger children joined in the laugh ; Lady Susan came to her grandson's rescue with a sharp thrust ; the fight went on, Cecil remaining neutral and amused.

‘I appeal to the judge,’ cried Charlie at last, finding himself worsted by his mother’s quick fence. ‘Come now, what do you say, sir?’

‘I say that I should like some tea,’ was the judicial response. ‘Come, Cissie, help your mother with the teacups.’ He looked at Cynthia as he spoke with one of the rapid glances he sometimes gave her, and which, on the rare occasions when she met them, quivered to the core of her heart, with the certainty of a still living though veiled devotion.

But she did not catch the lightning glance this time, because her attention was arrested by the approach of a servant announcing a visitor.

‘Captain—who?’ she asked. ‘Did he give you no card?’

The man replied that the visitor had no card, and that he called himself her ladyship’s brother.

‘But you know all my brothers, Steele,’ she remonstrated. ‘Surely the name is not Forde-Cusacke?’

‘Not exactly Cusacke, your la’ship — more like Cayacke; the gentleman speaks like a foreigner.’

‘This is some farce played by those boys,’ she said, referring to the youngest of the innumerable Forde-Cusackes. ‘Algy’s nonsense, no doubt.’

The judge, but faintly interested in the visitor, stood in his old position, slightly stayed against the bole of a young linden, with his youngest daughter in Cissie’s place on his arm, her long, bright hair rippling in the sunbeams. His back was turned to the approach from the house; he was dreamily receiving the impression of the pleasant picture before him: the three charming and tenderly beloved women of three generations; the fine lad facing them; the Rugby boy teaching a terrier to jump over his hands by their side; the sweetness of sunbeams filtering through cedar boughs, especially one bar of gold-dust which shook itself over Cynthia’s white serge gown and vibrated over her

braided hair and the beautiful curve of her neck turned towards the servant.

He remembered that sunbeam long ; it played on Cynthia's lips when she turned smiling to his mother, then it trembled over Cissie's slim, pink-clad figure as she brought him a cup of tea. No sooner had he taken the cup in his hand, to do which he turned slightly and disembarrassed himself of little Susie, than he dropped it with a tinkle of silver and broken china, and his face changed. He found himself eye to eye with the foreign captain, who, having followed the servant unseen to the garden-door, now hastened forwards in the effusive French manner to introduce himself.

But Cecil recognised him at once, though it was twenty years since he had last seen him.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNRISE.

THERE was a brief silence, through which quivered the pathetic gladness of a robin's song. Then the captain, rushing towards Cynthia, who was sufficiently indicated as Lady Marlowe by the servant's action and her relative age, stopped short with a bewildered look.

‘Où est donc Miladi Marlowe ?’ he asked brusquely, with a strong provincial accent.

Then Cynthia began to tremble exceedingly, she knew not why. ‘Moi, je la suis, monsieur,’ she replied with the gentle and tranquil manner and pure tones that exercised so calm, yet strong, a charm

on those who knew her. 'I am Lady Marlowe,' she added firmly in English, as if desirous of placing her identity beyond doubt. She had risen, and was looking with intent and fearful, though perfectly courteous, scrutiny at the square, strong figure before her, the blue-black eyes, thick, grizzled stubble of black hair, square, blue shaven face, and bristling moustache; there was something terribly familiar to her in that face; she seemed to have been expecting his next words for years and years.

'Où est donc ma sœur? sacre-r-r-nom — où est ta femme?—où est notre Renée?' cried Captain Kérouac, turning to the judge. 'Tu es toujours le même, toi.'

'Elle est morte,' Cecil replied with sombre brevity and staccato sharpness, as if the words had been forced from him against his will; to himself the three monosyllables, 'She is dead,' had a curious and startling sound; they seemed as if spoken by another man.

Lady Susan, sitting far back in the cedar shade, and less quick of hearing than of old, caught only a confused murmur of voices ; the children, interested rather in the unusual exterior and foreign gestures of the stranger, merely caught his strongly accented guttural words without grasping their full meaning. Their mother had been mistaken for someone else, and somebody's wife or sister was dead, the boys gathered ; only Cissie, older and in closer sympathy with her father, knew that some painful subject known to both parents had been brought to light. With quick instinct she began to attract people's attention, sending the terrier after a tennis-ball in the adjacent space marked out for the game.

‘I say, Cecilia,’ remonstrated Charlie in his new and still rather gruff bass, ‘what a thundering shame !’

‘Cécile, the little Cécile ?’ cried the stranger, catching the name, and still speaking French. ‘Renée's child ?’

He was rushing forward to embrace Cissie, who went cold and white ; but her

father caught him by the arm and drew him away, speaking in low, hurried tones, glancing with fiery eyes backwards over his shoulder as he went, and constraining him to follow by sheer strength of arm. Kérouac's blue-black eyes also flashed over his shoulder as he went, and his face was dark and lowering. Cynthia saw the two men vanish into the house and drew a deep breath, though the nervous quiver of her well-poised head and erect figure did not subside.

‘Cissie,’ she said in the clear, level voice, through which only her daughter detected a slight tremble, ‘give grannie some grapes. What is it, grannie, did you ask? Nothing, dear. One of the judge’s old clients, probably—a foreigner. What strange characters Cecil has known in his professional life!’

‘But what was the beggar saying to Cecilia?’ asked Charlie. ‘Somebody’s child, did he call her? A sort of French Dissenting parson, perhaps, calling any decent-looking girl a daughter of Belial.’

‘Or a daughter of Heth,’ added Cecilia. ‘Charlie, you must read William Black’s charming story. It delighted grannie.’

‘If Charlie could concentrate his gigantic intellect on such a trifle!’ grannie added tranquilly.

‘Why, it must be an old thing,’ Charlie objected; ‘the judge mentioned it as one of the ten novels he read and reviewed in a week in prehistoric days.’

Cynthia’s breath became freer and freer as the talk flowed in these peaceful channels; but the nervous quiver continued; she looked at the little heap of broken china shining in the sun where Cecil had dropped it. It was as if all her life lay there shattered to fragments nothing could piece together again.

‘Mother!’ cried Cecilia that night, creeping into her room, after they had gone to bed, ‘only tell me one thing. Am I your child? Oh, mother, let me be yours!’

‘My foolish Cissie, what fancies are these?’ murmured Cynthia, hushing the

slight figure, shaken with sobs, in her arms. 'What was grannie saying on your last birthday! That you were the tiniest baby ever seen, and born in this very room. Go to bed, dear. I am very tired.'

Her voice quivered and failed, and Cissie understood that sorrow deep as life weighed on her mother's heart, and that she could not comfort her.

The mysterious visitor remained long closeted in the library with the judge, but what passed between those two men was never known. There were guests to dine that night—there are always guests when family crises occur—but the judge did not appear; his son sat in his place at table and apologies were made for the absent host.

Everyone was more or less uneasy at that dinner, as if the moral atmosphere were oppressively overcharged with electricity, as the physical is before storm. All the evening Cynthia was acutely conscious of those two men shut up in the library, and her imagination and

memory were filling up lurid spaces in the outlines briefly sketched by those few words and actions beneath the cedars. No wonder she was tired.

She had sent her maid away for the night; and when Cissie left her, she sank into an easy chair, dressed as she was, with jewels sparkling on her neck and arms, as if in response to the iridescent gleaming of her eyes, and closed those tired eyes and let her arms hang nerveless by her side in an attitude of utter dejection. She did not know if the foreign captain were still there or not; Cecil had given no sign since his hurried entrance while she was dressing for dinner, when he had briefly told her how to account for his absence from the table.

Utterly worn out as she was, the pictures conjured up by the words 'Renée,' 'my sister,' 'your wife,' 'little Cécile,' 'Renée's child,' kept passing in vivid succession before her mental vision; her thoughts went deep into the past, and she saw the young distraught foreign

woman bursting from the shadow of the pine-trees into the crowd on the ice, and the painful scene that followed. Then Christmas Eve, the story of the sword told by firelight, while the driving storm hid the outer world and moulded that terrible sculpture in the deepening night. Then the emerging of the statue from the block; the arrival of the child; Cecil's behaviour and words through all till the loss of Cécile, who was without doubt *his own child*; lastly, her own mistaken cry on the eve of their marriage, 'Let me be blind!' Then, while she was thus consumed with painful conjectures and memories, the door opened softly and Cecil himself stood before her, grave and pale, with a hard look in his hollow eyes.

'Of course,' he said, in cold, sharp tones, 'it must be explained. It cannot be done in two words. I will write it, and you shall have it in the morning when you wake.'

'No; oh no! Tell me, dear Cecil; tell me now. How can I sleep till I know?'

‘You had better try,’ he replied grimly. ‘I doubt if you will sleep much afterwards.’

He was too desperate to be kind. The consciousness that he had injured her made him cruel, by some perverse law of human, or at least male human, nature. But the pathos of her face and her painful shrinking beneath his words touched him, and he burst into sudden, hot tears, quickly over. ‘I cannot tell it; I must write it,’ he added: ‘I will bring it to you when it is done. Only sleep if you can.’

Then he left her, and Cynthia, who had risen while speaking, turned and, catching sight of herself in a full-length mirror, felt the incongruity of her jewels and rich attire with the utter desolation in her heart, and began slowly to despoil herself of her adornments and unloose the thick braids of her hair.

Cecil in the meantime returned to the library, whence he had but just dismissed his unwelcome guest, and, sitting down at a writing-table, sent his pen flying over a

sheet of blank paper, and another and another. After all, it was very simple just to narrate the plain truth from the beginning. At one time he had found it difficult to say exactly why he had married Renée K  rouac, but he had thought it over so often since that he knew how to account for it to himself. 'But Heaven only knows why I kept it secret so long,' he added; 'it could not have been only from the fear of vexing my father and mother, and the dread of publishing the fact that I had made a fool of myself. I fear there was something deeper and more subtle, some crooked half-conscious hope of winning what the knowledge of that marriage would have lost for me. Looking back, I see that from the day I met you it became more difficult to acknowledge that wretched marriage, although it was my full purpose to do so ultimately. We postpone the evil day from an instinctive feeling that all days may come to an end soon ; the longer it is delayed the less likely it is to occur at all. But the game

is over; plain truth can neither heal nor harm. It is nothing to the man who died yesterday whether he was called a prince or a peasant while he lived.'

Cynthia found the time long till the writing was done. It was a warm autumn night, still, and flooded with light from the harvest moon; the trees stood motionless: their foliage might have been carved in stone. From the window at which she stood, her hot face pressed against the cool stone mullion, she could see many of the alterations they had planned and made together since their marriage.

There had never been any question of 'mine' or 'thine' between them; all had been 'ours'; she had taken pleasure in putting herself in the second place and had always preferred the 'master's' will to her own. But he had never loved her. Another had reigned before her — alas! with her. There was no doubt that the young lover to whom she had given her heart and life had been a married man. His wife had seen that kiss by the Christmas

hearth, the kiss she held so holy—Cecil's wife ! The thought turned her sick. That poor Renée was the happiest woman, after all ; he had not sought her for her possessions, but for herself. And she died young.

Her hot and aching eyes rested on a clump of fine young firs, dark in the moonlight ; they were planted in the year of the marriage. Those lindens and chestnuts were of Cissie's age ; her father often compared their growth with hers, and said they had a distinctive slimness matching them with her sister. The sturdy young oaks were Charlie's trees ; he would be past middle age before they were of decent height. The gray-green willows lower down by the pond were planted for the blue-eyed baby who faded in a few weeks. How bitterly she had wept for the small unconscious creature she had scarcely seen ! What a grief its loss had been ! yet that grief was pleasure compared with this awful pain. Nothing now could heal or help her ; her life was shattered, her world swept away.

While the wife kept this sorrowful vigil, the husband wrote diligently, but with many pauses for consideration, through the dead hours. Then at last he laid down his pen, put his manuscript neatly together with the ease of orderly habit, took it to Cynthia's room, laid it on the sofa-pillow in which she had buried her face, and went back to the library through the dark, silent house.

The moon had sunk and the candles were burning low when he again reached the library: he drew the curtains from the open window and opened it wider, that the air might enter more freely. Then he began to consider what Cynthia would do. No doubt she would try to conceal the inevitable rupture for the children's sake. They might agree henceforth to be nearly always in different places; he might live a great deal in chambers, she at Swanbourne. She was so clever and full of tact. Perhaps it would be best to make some excuse for going abroad: he might get a colonial appointment; he might

easily retire from the Bench ; it was not so easy to retire from life. The children must be considered. They would know of this first secret marriage—all the world would know ; K  rouac would talk about that nameless grave in Cottesloe Churchyard, and about the lost child. Cynthia would give the children to understand that there was nothing hidden from her—would perhaps find some reason for the mystery about the first wife’s grave. And K  rouac might return no more. He had been right in assuming that the peasant K  rouacs, hearing nothing from their child and sister, would make no inquiries, but conclude that she had died or forgotten them ; but he had not foreseen the case of a K  rouac rising in life, wearing epaulettes, seeing the world, and reading foreign papers in which the name of Sir Cecil Marlowe would be conspicuous. He remembered now that this young K  rouac had been remarkably intelligent and alive to the world beyond the village steeple : he had even been interested in the hand-

some lad, and helped kindle his ambition.

If since Cécile's loss darkness had been growing between them, and the discovery of that fragment of Renée's letter had slain her love, what could this revelation effect in Cynthia?

He looked upon the trees they had planted together with eyes scorched by scanty hot tears. There was the tree against which he leant in that afternoon's pleasant peace, with his long-guarded secret still secure; all that safe domestic scene seemed to have happened years ago. The dim masses of foliage were beginning to take a more certain shape beneath the wan sky, whence the stars were slowly fading; the bitter night was nearly spent; the dawn of a more bitter day gleamed pale in the east; birds were piping faintly and fitfully; the candles, burnt down into their sockets, sent up one blue and ghostly flare, glimmered feebly, and went out in smoke and sputter.

A lovely rose-flush came from the

unrisen sun, steeped some floating feathery clouds in the zenith and coloured all the west; the lonely room was filled with rosy light, which quivered on the walls like the life-blood of the universe. How often he had welcomed the old familiar life-like glow that to-day brought such misery ! He had been unkind to her, he had wrecked her happiness, and yet she was dear to him as in the young far-off days of passion and poesy, perhaps dearer, certainly more necessary to his happiness ; life would be as impossible with her now as without her ; the day in such haste to be born would indeed be a dark one.

The rose-flush deepened, dyeing the white panels of the door, which opened softly and silently, admitting Cynthia.

Her white garments were steeped in red dawn-light ; some jewels, forgotten in her ears, caught the glory and shivered it into many rays. She came straight to him, her deep and lustrous eyes dewy and soft, her face clear in the glow and radiant with inward light, like the face of one of Dante's

angels—all the light of his life shone from the bright presence and transfigured gaze.

‘Cecil,’ she said in the voice that was like a well-sounded instrument of many notes—‘*my Cecil!*’

‘It was for you—for you!’ he cried, all his love and pain sounding in his voice like the surging of a long, strong wave as it gathers gradually to its summit and falls.

They were silent until the rose-flush died away and the sun rose and shot some long golden bars slantwise through the window upon them.

‘Had you no wife, that you should have borne this alone?’ she said at last.

‘You would never have been my wife if you had known.’

‘How can I tell? One loves once and for ever. But how could we live, how did we live, with that between us?’

‘I dared not risk the truth.’

‘You should have trusted. Think what marriage means, dear Cecil. My dear, we are one.’

She could not justify him, but her blame

spoke only in a pained silence ; the ideal lover of youth and romance had faded and fled, but the husband of her love and loyalty remained, the father of her children, the fallen archangel, still trailing clouds of his pristine glory. Nor would she suffer him to take overmuch blame to himself. He was not directly accountable for his wife's death ; she did not think, as he feared, that Renée had taken poison ; she could account for the empty bottle smelling of bitter almonds which he had seen fall from the folds of her dress and secreted.

‘ Truth, plain truth, makes life so simple,’ she sighed. ‘ Honour makes it so lovely,’ she thought.

CHAPTER VII.

COMMISSION DAY.

TIME dealt as tenderly with Mr. Forde-Cusacke as if the old mower loved that worthy gentleman. Through all the vicissitudes of his married years, which had now passed the bourn of the Silver Wedding, he contrived to preserve intact his self-esteem, his teeth and his pomposity, his prolix monologues, his command of large language and of things in general. Cynthia could not remember when his hair was not iron-gray and his forehead bald ; he was now neither balder nor grayer than in her childhood. He still patronized mankind from the lofty standpoint of his own superiority, and still continued to wonder

at the presumption implied in the mere existence of individual men. He still represented a Conservative constituency, and still periodically asked questions in the House on subjects that he crammed but never digested.

‘Who is that black man?’ he once asked, pointing to the guest of the evening at a public dinner.

‘That is Prince Bhoolie-Bhoolie,’ was the impressive and solemn reply.

‘And, pray, who is he?’ continued Mr. Forde-Cusacke severely.

‘Well, he is the envoy from the injured King of Cherri-Bhang.’

‘Cherri-Bhang,’ murmured Mr. Forde-Cusacke pensively. ‘To be sure. Then he must be the man I asked a question about last night in the House.’ Whereupon he patronized Prince Bhoolie-Bhoolie with great benevolence.

He sometimes did more than ask questions in the House. But whatever he did, the spectacle of that honourable member upon his legs was, as of yore, the signal

for other honourable members to slumber peacefully, or walk out of the House.

In the year of grace following the arrival of Uncle K  rouac at Swanbourne, he most nobly filled the office and uniform of High Sheriff, not without a pensive conviction that his county was as unworthy as it was unable to appreciate the full measure of its own blessedness in the appointment of so great a man to the shrievalty.

Thus it came to pass that, one cold sunny morning in early spring, he found himself faring forth in the decorated carriage, and that due state of which he mournfully foresaw the speedy abolition, to receive the judge and open the commission of the peace. The quiet, old-fashioned county town turned in its slumber and gave token of life on that great occasion ; people who were neither going to church, chapel, or dinner, nor returning therefrom, were walking in the streets ; bells were ringing, trumpets pealing, the javelins of the sheriff's quaintly liveried followers glittering in the sun.

Cynthia and Cissie, who had driven into Alcaster with the sheriff and Mrs. Forde-Cusacke that morning, sat in the bow-window of the ancient timber-framed inn, the Angel, in the High Street, to see the, to Cecilia, novel spectacle of the judge's coming in, before privately receiving that august personage and spending the afternoon with him.

Tramp, tramp went the heavy measured steps of policemen and sheriff's men, a sort of burden to the bell-melody; the banners of uplifted trumpets swayed in the wind; the procession stopped at the church-door within sight of the Angel, and gold-laced sheriff and scarlet and ermined judge alighted and entered the church, whence the organ was faintly heard rolling out the National Anthem beneath trumpet-blasts and chiming bells.

'I wish we had gone to church,' said Cissie, who had been looking on, grave and silent. . 'I wish Mr. Luscombe would not laugh at these things. I only wonder that father can ever smile.'

‘Mr. Luscombe is not yet a judge,’ Cynthia replied, with a half-sympathetic, half-amused look at her child’s serious face.

‘But, my dear, why should your poor father not smile?’ asked Mrs. Forde-Cusacke in alarm.

‘Oh, grannie dear, think how awful it must be to sit in judgment on one’s fellow-creatures ; to feel that the reputation and liberty, even the life, of the poor creature in the dock depends upon the way in which the trial is conducted ! And then to have to pronounce sentence—and you know father has often said that punishments are left too much to the discretion of judges, and are sadly unequal—above all, to condemn to death ! Oh, mother, I don’t like to think he could do that !’

‘Only cowards shrink from painful duty, Cissie,’ her mother broke in.

It jarred upon Cissie to be strolling through the sunshiny streets, sight-seeing and shopping, while her father was at church, preparing solemnly for the most

solemn function a human being can perform. The Bar should be there. Lionel Luscombe should not call the thing an anachronism and talk about middle-age survivals and ages of faith, as if the present were not as much an age of faith as any.

It chanced that they were near the Court of Assize when the judicial procession returned from the church and stopped at the gloomy building that must have seen so much human misery and futile remorse. Again the heavy, measured tramp, tramp of the dark mass of county police and gay galaxy of javelin men round the sheriff's carriage ; again the flutter of banners and flourish of trumpets, the gleam of scarlet and ermine, gold lace and sword of office, as the judge and sheriff passed under the smoked and stuccoed Ionic colonnade to proclaim the iniquity of crime and open the commission that was to deliver the gaol of its dismal burden.

The sky was blue above the grimy

architrave, where pigeons sat preening themselves in the sun; passengers passed and repassed the courtyard railing; boys shouted at play; carriages rolled by. Workmen, lounging out the end of the dinner-hour, and *habitués* of street corners, stolidly discussed between long whiffs of strong tobacco the dramas about to be enacted in that unlovely theatre, the temper of the judge and leading counsel, the evidence likely to be adduced in cases of local interest, with anecdotes of former occasions and of personal experience in the witness-box. 'Blowed if I knowed what I said,' a gasfitter was observing. 'By the time he'd a-done with me there wasn't nothen I wouldn't a-sweared to. If 'e'd a-said, "Wasn't you the Pope o' Rome's fust wife afore you took to gas?" blowed if I shouldn't a-thought I med a-ben!'

Cissie thought of the friends of those about to be tried. Some had wives, and some fathers and mothers. Yonder, in the square-towered castle used as a gaol, did

the captives hear the bells? A woman was to be tried for murder, a young creature like herself, a thing that laughed and cried, feared and hoped, as she did. She might have been in that young woman's place. Once she had been indignant at the behaviour of some bold-faced, foul-tongued women in the street, and her mother had rebuked her.

‘There are many such women, Cissie,’ Cynthia then said, in her deep, sweet voice. ‘And they are all *our sisters*.’

The old childish fancy of ‘the other Cissie, the poor Cissie,’ out in the cold world, unloved and uncared for, floated through her mind. Might people visit and comfort those poor strayed creatures in their captivity?

When they went back to the Angel, there was her father in his usual dress, cheerful and affectionate, full of the droll sayings delivered so gravely, that delighted her and made her laugh, when a fine smile would play round his mouth and a sparkle appear in his great dark eyes. He was the

most amusing and interesting companion in the world—except, perhaps, Mr. Luscombe—the two together were irresistible.

It was pleasant by the river that sunny afternoon; the keen wind was quieting down towards the set of sun, the budding woods were loud with bird-songs, primroses and violets were to be found everywhere; and the judge told them the merry tale of the ghost in the ruined chapel on the hill, a mile out of Alcester. But Cissie's thoughts were still occupied with the young woman immured in the gloomy building just seen through the violet smoke-haze across the river. Did that poor prisoner ever gather primroses in sweet spring days? Had she had an indulgent father and sweet mother? Would she see the kind face that his daughter had never beheld without comfort looking stern and cold with condemnation upon her, and hear the lips, now smiling and always gentle, pronounce her death-doom? It was well for Cissie that this meeting on circuit was exceptional.

‘Why, Cissie, you are as grave as a judge!’ her father said.

‘Or a judge’s daughter,’ she replied, turning from the stile over which she had been leaning, and looking at the distant town folded in dust of amethyst and gold in the sunlight.

‘She will smile now,’ the judge whispered to Cynthia. ‘There comes that young rascal, looking as demure as a cream-stealing cat. He’ll swear the meeting was an accident.’

The young rascal, otherwise that promising junior, Mr. Lionel Luscombe, fulfilled one part of this prediction, as did Cissie the other, when he came up with the Marlowes shortly after. It was only natural that he should join them. He suggested going to a picturesque old inn by the waterside, where the ladies could have tea and brown bread and the rich butter for which the place was renowned, also honey from the garden hives. Izaak Walton had put up at that inn, according to tradition, and here probably, leaving his

lavender-scented sheets, he had heard Maudlin sing so cheerily at her milking-pail in the early morning. Falstaff might have lounged in here with all his boon companions, a merry rout of disreputable good-fellows. Bardolph's nose might have glowed by such a pungent wood-fire as they found in the wainscoted parlour that afternoon.

The four voices were just right for a snatch of part-song, wholesome as Maudlin's own rhyme. Falstaff's party could scarcely have been gayer, though it might have been less decorous than this, the chief drawback being that they had to hasten back to Alcaster, where a carriage had been long waiting to take Cynthia and Cissie home to Melton.

'Is it serious?' the father and mother were asking each other, as they waited at the last stile for the young people to come up—a handsome pair, the youth fair and tall, with a keen, intellectual face and honest eyes, the maiden slim and fragile,

with a sensitive, blush-rose face, both radiantly happy.

‘I am so glad you came, Cynthia,’ Cecil added, while they were still alone. ‘Could you come in on Thursday morning, before I go into court, do you think?’

She promised to come, not without a little wonder that he should wish to see her again so soon, although she knew well that since that day last autumn, when the barrier of falsehood had been thrown down between them, he had never cared to be absent long from her.

She looked at the young pair, who witnessed to the years that had fled since youthful love had drawn Cecil and herself together, and wondered that she was not happier in her husband’s strong and lasting love. Her eyes in these days were more wistful than ever; she had an ever-present feeling as if some irreparable loss had befallen her. The knowledge of the secret first marriage and the long deceit in which it was involved had struck a mortal blow at her happiness.

The love that pities is great and very tender, but greater is the love that admires and rejoices in its admiration. In substituting pity for reverence she felt as if deprived of a life-long shelter, or as if a scaffolding had given way beneath her ; her heart was homeless and home-sick.

But Cecil was as if new-born in the confidence that followed the overthrow of that black barrier ; he was strengthened and purified, and all that was noblest in him was set free by the rending of that veil of falsehood.

‘ The nightingale returns with spring,
From distant lands she cometh ;
New lays of love she doth not bring,
Her old song ever charmeth,’

they sang in the inn parlour, and the singing and the spring-time, the two young lovers and something in Cecil’s voice, had wrought together in the golden afternoon to touch her deeply. She had now had time to recover from the shock of the disclosure of Cecil’s long falsehood ; she was beginning to feel the power of his

repentance, the finer elements in his character were becoming manifest; after all, he *might* have been the man she dreamed. Her heart awoke to a new tenderness. Had she thought too hardly of him? His first error was that of a generous nature, and he had been surprised into denial of his wife. There had been kindness, even a sort of perverted heroism, in keeping her blind, as she had asked. And if suffering can atone—her poor Cecil!—she alone knew. He kept count of Cécile's exact age, and every unknown girl-face of that age was an object of agitating interest to him, lest it might be that of the lost girl.

'But now,' he said to his wife that afternoon, 'I have not even that clue; you cannot tell the age of a woman between eighteen and thirty. Every year crystallizes character and increases estrangement. Cissie's childhood is almost forgotten, her character sets firmer day by day.'

When they drove back to Melton in the misty gold of the sunset, mother and

daughter were silent, each gazing dreamily before her, each singing in her heart the old song the nightingale brings with every spring ; but there were deeper, fuller, more heart-searching notes in the mother's song than in the child's. 'Love's not Time's fool,' nor 'alters when it alteration finds,' but 'bears it out even to the edge of doom.'

Cynthia thought of the something new in her husband's dark, full glance and of the lingering hand-clasp he gave when he returned to the carriage-door to say 'Good-bye' once more.

Years after she saw him thus, a tall man of noble presence, standing, his hat raised, his forehead fully seen in its strength and nobility, with smiling yet drooping lips, and wistful eyes. Her own eyes smarted with quick-springing tears as she was borne away into the sunset glory with the primroses he had gathered exhaling their delicate scent in the still air.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDICTMENT.

WHEN Lady Marlowe reached Alcaster on the forenoon of Thursday, she discovered to her regret that the judge was already in court, so that she was too late to see him, and she was more sorry for this than she could have thought it possible to be for so apparently trivial a cause. That something in her husband's face, as she last saw him in the spring sunset on the platform, filled her with indefinable foreboding. He had painful business on hand, and a few minutes with her would have cheered and braced him for the day's work. 'What if this should be his *last* request ?'

‘Oh, Marmaduke,’ she cried to the brother to please whom she had missed going in early with the sheriff, and whose unexpected and exasperating dawdling had caused the delay, ‘when *will* you learn to know the value of time?’

‘Next time I want a bill renewed,’ was the serene and philosophic reply. ‘But why so tragic, Cyn? Look here! if you have anything to say to the judge, only write it, and I’ll give it to his clerk. In the meantime, as I’ve lost my train, I’ve two blessed hours to kill, and I’m at your service all the while. Shall we go into court? Never was in a court of justice in my life.’

The idea of going into a court of law had never before occurred to her, but the suggestion and the opportunity together were irresistible. She was wearing a thick veil to protect her from the sharp east wind, so she thought she might venture, for Cecil would not detect her presence, and she would much like to see him in the novel aspect of judge for once.

The brother and sister therefore made their way through the sunny streets to the gloomy court-house at the top of the town, Lady Marlowe too preoccupied to give full attention to Marmaduke's cheerful chatter. They turned aside in a doorway to let a troop of cavalry jingle by, with clank of sabre and bit and gay glitter of arms and accoutrements, and then they turned in at the gateway and crossed the high-walled courtyard.

A heavy oppression weighed leaden and stifling upon Cynthia when she passed beneath the smoke-grimed colonnade that ran across the face of the building, and entered the hall between the civil and criminal courts, which was not an enlivening place ; turning aside to the latter court, she lost the clear spring sunlight and came into what at first seemed darkness. Her brother having found an inconspicuous place here, whence everything could be well seen, her eyes began to accustom themselves to the gloom, and she looked round the building with much interest and

half-fearful curiosity, like a child listening to a ghost-story.

Something was being read out in a monotonous voice ; it sounded like a sermon when one enters a church during its delivery ; Marmaduke whispered to her that it was the indictment.

The court was of a fair size and height ; its bare walls were painted of a dark slate colour ; the dimmed daylight, falling through dull - tinted window-panes, was further obscured by the heavy pillars of the outer colonnade, some galleries running athwart the tall windows on the inside and the iron bars across the windows, which were protected and darkened yet more by wire netting outside ; the result was gloomy and depressing in the extreme. The one bit of colour, besides the royal arms on the canopy, the sheriff's uniform and the liveries of the javelin men (now nearly obsolete), was the scarlet of the judge's robe, and that was emphasized by the snowy ermine and powdered peruke—yet even this colouring was dimly seen in the

dismal light. The Bar were black figures below the Bench, the solicitors and clerks were black, the reporters were black in their place, and the jury were black in theirs. The public were chiefly men, hence dark; the few women were dingy; the policemen were dark, the warders dark; the witness-box was empty, but the prisoner in the dock——

Cynthia's heart contracted at the sight of the shrinking figure on that shameful eminence, exposed to the full gaze of all those hard, critical, unfeeling eyes, some pitying, perchance, some ruffianly, some merely curious; it was a slight, bowed, graceful figure, dark-clad, dark-haired—that of a young, very young, woman.

‘I say,’ Marmaduke whispered to his sister, ‘I didn’t know this kind of thing was on. We’d better go at once.’

But Cynthia could not go; she sat on, as if under a spell; she did not know what had come to her, her will was fettered; she positively dared not and did not go, in spite of her brother's repeated remon-

strances. She looked up with pained and strained sympathy at the judge—an imposing figure, exalted and alone beneath his canopy ; face, form and presence all fully answering to the trying requirements of his costume. His clear-cut, clean-shaven face was set in a thoughtful, even stern, composure ; he looked sometimes at the papers before him, and sometimes at the prisoner, whose face was screened by her slender, work-roughened hands. Whenever he looked at the prisoner, his wife observed a faint, scarcely perceptible, change in his face, like the slight darkening of still water under a passing breeze ; she also observed the nervous movements of his long fingers amongst the papers laid before him.

She felt that she would have given the whole world not to have come, and at the same time no earthly power could have induced her to go until this drama was played out to the end. To see that young, young creature in the dock, even such an one as she herself had once been and their

own Cissie now was, might well fill the judge with painful and disquieting emotion. To try a woman for her life, to condemn a shrinking, shuddering, utterly defenceless girl to death—what a task for a human-hearted man, with warm blood in his veins, and the memory of youthful joys and strong fatherly love in his heart !

But what had brought that poor, pale child to such a pass ? Was it only the weakness of tempted and unguarded youth ? Yet what frailty, what temptation, what blighting, blinding, hopeless misery could so pervert a woman's nature and quench the deep and mighty maternal instinct as to make her turn upon her own little living child and destroy it ? Cynthia looked at the slender, shrinking figure with sick dismay ; that young soft thing had heard her baby's cry with hate and cruelty, in place of pity and love. Or had her brain been turned for the time by misery and extreme anguish of travail ? It was possible ; possible, too, that she might now be awake to bitter sanity and

remorse. The judge had written, and habitually spoke, with severity of such crime as that imputed to her, and was never weary of blaming the sentimental weakness that spares such criminals.

He had spoken to this effect in charging the grand jury the day before. Most of the jurors were acquainted with him ; he had dined, lunched, shot and hunted with them at one time or another during his visits to Melton. Some of them had heard the strange and startling rumours lately circulated respecting a secret marriage and a lost child, extraordinary disclosures and painful family scenes at Swanbourne ; these gentlemen were, therefore, rather scornful at hearing Sir Cecil Marlowe on the solemnity of parental duty and responsibility. Yet where could one find a parent so theoretically virtuous as the amiable Jean Jacques Rousseau ?

The indictment was soon over, yet not too soon for the judge's disquiet to increase to a painful degree during its recital.

The scene presented by a criminal court,

though so new to Lady Marlowe, was familiar in all its details to her husband; they were types rather than individuals before him. He knew almost exactly what every witness would say, and the questions of counsel on either side were stereotyped in his brain by frequent repetition. He was an expert in reading the faces of criminals, he had studied so many; he could tell almost exactly what the bearing of any prisoner would be during trial, and how each would receive sentence. Familiar too, sickeningly familiar, was the peculiar surging of that pale sea of expectant human faces and the deadly heart-sickness that came over him while severe or capital sentence was being pronounced, though, being so young on the Bench, he had seldom given extreme sentence himself.

But human nature is so infinite in its variety, and the most obvious and familiar types are so dangerous to theorize upon, that he was sometimes surprised and startled. Last week, for instance, when,

on sentencing a prisoner to penal servitude for life, a sudden heart-piercing shriek, like that of a wounded horse, rang through the court. And still, accurately as he could classify jurors after a careful scrutiny of their faces, he had now and then been astonished by an unexpected verdict.

During his last circuit, in the face of the clearest evidence, a man had been acquitted of the manslaughter of his wife. That type of prisoner stands in the dock at nearly every assize, an ordinary surly fellow, selfish, sensual, brutal, yet not vicious, even capable of kindness to any woman not legally his chattel and body-slave, like her whose unexpected succumbing to violence, such as she had endured almost daily for years, had placed him in such a nasty predicament. But that man went out of court scot-free.

To-day Mr. Justice Marlowe studied the faces of the jurors with unusual interest, hoping that in this case they might be as impervious as that other jury to evidence

which was too sadly clear to him : he had never before so strongly desired the acquittal of any prisoner, guilty or not guilty, as he desired that of the young woman now before him.

She was neatly dressed in such garments as are worn by quiet women of all ranks, so that it was difficult to class her. Her splendid hair was bound in massive plaits about her bowed head, her face unseen beneath her quivering hands; she appeared so crushed by her double shame—that of the criminal in the dock, and that so especially painful to women even when vicious—that the indictment might have been no more than a confused, unintelligible buzzing in her pained ears.

The indictment being ended, she was called upon to plead guilty or not. She paused a moment; then she slowly raised her drooping head, straightened her shrinking figure, glanced swiftly round at the pitiless, multitudinous gaze centred upon her, and finally looked up full in the face of the judge.

What was there in the full, deep gaze of her dark, black-fringed eyes, that the judge's should fill with dread and dismay at their encounter? They were piteous eyes, bewildered and sorrowful as a hunted animal's or suffering child's, yet beautiful, clear, and young — so young that the judge seemed to see all his own youth in their shining depths, as in a wizard's crystal or the ink-pool in the Hindoo lad's hollow palm. His mother seemed to gaze upon him from those great dark, soft orbs, his boyish self and his favourite child. His own eyes dilated and grew sombre with smouldering fire; something in the prisoner's name, hitherto unnoticed, struck him painfully.

Her tall, erect figure was, though slight and youthful, not wanting in dignity, and there was something un-English in its graceful pose; her face, now first fully seen by her judge, was a striking one — pale, clear-tinted, with low level brows, full red lips and well-cut features, terribly familiar to him; the nose was

straight, firm, and rather short; her glance by some strange magic accused him, her bearing seemed an indictment against him, to which he must plead guilty or not guilty in the face of that court and of a higher one.

It seemed an eternity before the prisoner's young, red lips at last moved in answer to the question, and her young, clear voice sounded through the listening court, vibrating with a thousand echoes through the most secret recesses of the judge's heart in this familiar sentence, 'Not guilty, my lord.'

Yet he knew that the evidence must kill her; nothing but a recommendation to mercy could save her. The prisoner's youth and temptations might be taken into account; besides, those jurors were men, not stones; beauty, youth, and misery could not fail to touch them.

'Not guilty, my lord.'

Words so often uttered in that place, and yet now so weighted with unutterable suggestion in the round, full tones of the

frail creature before him. The sound of surf was in them, the long roll of Channel breakers, the thunder of warring winds along a rocky coast and among the towers of a ruined château, the song of the Corregan, seductive and deadly, the wail of the *biniau*, the hiss of salt sea-winds over the dry grass on sandy heaths, the hum of spinning-wheels, the crackle of hearth-fires, the voice of a woman who loved him and had been loyal to him. ‘

But the court only heard the usual plea of a prisoner arraigned for trial on a usual charge; the misery outweighing that voice from the dock was usual; the prisoner’s beauty, though unusual, was of a kind that was not fully valued by most of those present.

‘Them quiet ones is deep as dies,’ a villainous-looking man muttered to an unwashed comrade; ‘never trust a quiet one.’

The judge glanced at the Bar, and the face of Lionel Luscombe comforted him. This young barrister was thinking, his

white forehead darkened by cross-lines ; he was a rising man and very determined, and he was for the defence.

The judge's swift glance of unconscious appeal to the counsel for the defence was such as a prisoner on his trial for life might have given, charged with an agony of hope and fear, full of the concentrated anguish of dumb appeal that doctors see by the bedsides of the dying, when eyes ask what lips dare not, 'Is there *no* hope?' One more such look towards the commonplace business faces of the jurors, and the judge's eyes rested quietly upon the papers before him ; and no one but his wife saw that he was trembling beneath his robes, and that the hand with which he raised a glass of water to his lips was steadied by an effort.

The prisoner's voice stirred Cynthia ; the full sight of the young woman's pale face made her heart beat with heavy throbs. Of whom or what did that suffering, shamed young face remind her ?—her husband's mother, whose dark, spiritual

eyes were like this poor lost girl's — a white face frozen in its passionate youth beneath the snowdrift, or the face which had charmed her youth, or that of her own daughter? After all, was there not something morbid in this haunting fear, born of Cecil's remorse? Should she allow herself to be infected by it? Why not? They were one; his sorrow was her sorrow, his remorse her remorse, his sin must poison her life as it poisoned his. Was it mere chance which had led her to that unaccustomed place on that especial morning?

The junior counsel having opened the prosecution by a brief outline of the facts of the case, Mr. Sykes Simeon, the senior prosecuting counsel, rose and addressed the jury with his accustomed clearness and emphasis. He was a tall man with an aquiline face and keen, deep-set eyes; he looked like a bird of prey about to swoop upon the defenceless quarry in the dock. He had a trick of fluttering his gown about while speaking till it looked like black wings—the 'Vampire' and the 'Vulture'

were among the names by which he was known to his learned brethren.

The prisoner, it appeared, had lived for some years in the service of a respectable family, by whom she was highly valued and treated with unusual consideration, evidence of good conduct on her part. Her antecedents were, however, doubtful, and her parentage was unknown. At the age of eleven or twelve she had run away from a good home, into which she had been adopted in infancy, and joined a circus company. After travelling with the circus for some years, and being trained to considerable proficiency, she again ran away. Being now about sixteen, she was for charity's sake taken into the service of a Dissenting minister, where she remained only a short time. She then appeared to have vibrated between the workhouse and short periods of domestic service for two or three years, till she again entered service, destitute, half starved — again employed for charity's sake. Her master was blind, and the prisoner was of use to him in

many ways, so that she became in a measure his personal attendant, walked with him, and was considered as a member of the family. In October last, having been with these Lewises for four years, she asked for the first time for a holiday of several days to recruit her health, which appeared to be breaking down. This being granted, she went to a town called Lesscombe, ostensibly to stay with an old fellow-servant. She remained with this woman only one day, passing the rest of her holiday with a Mrs. Dickson in the same town, and representing herself to her as Mrs. George, wife of a sailor who had just joined his ship. There she gave birth to a son, which she left in Mrs. Dickson's charge. She then returned to her employers, who had no suspicion of what had occurred. In the following January she again obtained a day's holiday, her health and spirits having been variable since October, and again went to Lesscombe, again ostensibly to visit the fellow-servant, whom, as before, she only saw for a short time.

In the afternoon of January 10 she went to Mrs. Dickson's, and took her child away for a walk. She was seen, closely veiled, carrying the child on the road to Weston Wood, two miles from Lesscombe. She was again seen sitting with it on a felled trunk in the wood, not far from the pool in which the body was afterwards found. She was further seen returning without the child, crying and agitated. The same evening she went to Mrs. Dickson's, paid her all that was owing for the baby's keep, gave her a present and the whole of the child's clothing besides, saying that a relative had taken charge of her baby. She had been crying, and her manner, together with something she had heard, aroused Mrs. Dickson's suspicion. Next day the prisoner went back to Woodleigh, where her employers observed that her spirits were variable, and that she was altogether unlike herself. Her return was on January 11.

On the 14th a woodcutter found the unclothed body of a baby in a pool in the wood, in which also articles of infant's

clothing and one or two things known to belong to the prisoner had been picked up. No one else had been seen to enter the wood on the 10th.

Such, according to Mr. Sykes Simeon, were the main facts of the case.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROSECUTION.

THE name of Cicely Rennie, who was aged twenty-one, of imperfect education, and charged with an ordinary though capital crime, had excited no unusual interest in Mr. Justice Marlowe when he saw it in the calendar; the Christian name suggested rural life and bygone idylls; the surname nothing. Nor would Cynthia have observed these names, disconnected with the history briefly sketched by counsel for the prosecution, and without the impressive face and voice of the prisoner. The age was not that which most interested Cecil, for his lost child would have been twenty-two. Both husband and wife clung to

this slight discrepancy as the sad story went on in Mr. Sykes Simeon's clear and emphatic voice and flowing delivery, a stream that they would have given their lives to stop or turn back.

It could not be true, Cynthia said to herself; it was surely some painful coincidence; the air of that dismal place, tainted with the breath of innumerable criminals and echoing with the dreary recital of innumerable crimes, heavy with the anguish of dreaded sentences and fruitless remorse, had unnerved her and infected her with morbid imaginings. Why had she come? Yet if this terrible thing were true, how could she be elsewhere? And what could Cecil do? Could he sentence his own child? Was it in his power to dismiss or defer the case? Ought he, or dared he, conduct the trial in such a way as to bring about an acquittal? In her heart she had tried and convicted the unfortunate girl already; she felt that there was no hope except in some technical loophole—some lack or inconsistency of evidence. What

would Mr. Luscombe do? He could not destroy evidence. The prisoner was in reality being tried and condemned or acquitted by such accidents and circumstances as were known, or could be spoken to, by others. She thought of a Bar at which all facts are known and are the sole witnesses, jurors, and advocates, before a Judge from whom nothing is concealed, and was calmed.

She looked again at the prisoner's clear, pale face and large, luminous eyes, and her heart smote her that she had too readily condemned her. Despite the wild vagabond life the girl had led, there was no trace of evil in that despairing young face; there was a tenderness about the drooping mouth that negatived the possibility of child-murder; the death might, after all, have been accidental—the frail thread of an infant's life is so quickly snapped; but, the death having taken place, Cicely would have the most powerful motives for concealing it; the very clumsiness and futility of her concealment argued innocence.

So the judge was thinking; but he knew more than Cynthia of the case. He had studied faces to some purpose; and the anxious scrutiny he gave to the features of this wronged girl told him that there was no depravity, though there might be frailty, beneath that fair exterior. Terrible possibilities of passion and pride, he conjectured, and a pride to which shame was intolerable; but there was a sweetness, a look such as that in the eyes on which his youth had rested for comfort. A wholesome and gracious nature looked from those large wistful eyes, even a generous and noble nature, capable of great sacrifice and lofty aspiration; but the full, proudly-curving lips suggested a sensuous, pleasure-loving temperament. Then that wild up-bringing, the loose morality and coarse talk of the wandering circus life; the workhouse associations; the hard life of a friendless and incapable domestic drudge. Were these surroundings in which fine qualities are easily developed? Could the purest nature emerge unscathed from

such a furnace? He had been strong on the power of early training and association and the consequent urgency of parental responsibility. Lack of training or ill-training he held to be the chief source of crime.

If what he dreaded as to her origin were true, this was an exceptional nature, needing exceptional treatment; the free and sturdy Breton peasant strain blended with the intellectual needs and the inbred delicacy of a highly-cultured race.

The piteous spectacle of a neglected, wronged, and lonely childhood and youth rose before him. He pictured the artisan home from which the child fled to the unsuspected perils of the glittering circus life, no doubt rough, possibly brutal. What a home for the highly-strung, fervid creature before him! He pictured the girl circus-rider, her fatal beauty blossoming in air tainted with gas and tan and orange-peel, companioned by rowdy men and painted women, beguiled by the poor glitter of tinsel and the cheap admiration

of the ring. He saw her, berouged and bedizened, flying through hoops, poised on men's shoulders, overtasked, over-indulged, misled, ill-treated, escaping contamination, if at all, by a miracle, and his conscience accused him. What could be expected of a girl so situated?

Why had she left that wild, wandering life; might she have become aware of its perils, and therefore fled its temptations? It was not an attractive career to which this unfriended child turned in exchange, and yet she had not turned back from the cinders and ashes of dull little kitchens to the spangles and flying steeds, the good fellowship and good fare of Mademoiselle Zéphyrine's more dazzling lot. She had suffered want and sickness, and Heaven alone knew what temptation, before this final, hopeless fall. These reflections pleaded for her, and brought scalding tears to her judge's eyes. Surely Mr. Luscombe would urge previous good character, improbability, and lack of motive, in his defence.

After all, Cecil was not sure of this girl's identity: he would try to dismiss the terror of it from his mind, if only to leave his brain clear and his mind unbiased, that he might fulfil the solemn duty for which he sat in that high place, wearing the scarlet of power and the ermine of purity. He was there to administer justice without respect of persons; it was his duty to dismiss feeling, suppress the man, and be the official only, until the torture of that cruel trial was over and right done; then there would be time enough to weep.

The junior called the first witness for the prosecution; others were called in due succession, examined, cross-examined, and re-examined; the sad story went on with amplified and emphasized detail. Hope died in Cecil's heart: it seemed as if he had been sitting on that bench for an eternity, with all his misdeeds arraigned before him, compelled by an invincible necessity to pronounce his own irreversible doom. All that a judge can lawfully do

to procure an acquittal he did, striving to keep his brain clear and his feelings in subjection.

Cynthia scarcely knew for agonized interest in this painful drama what went on around her ; she was dimly aware that her brother, after vainly trying to get her away, had left the court when the time came for his train. She did not know how it was that Bob Ryall stood near her, but felt some comfort in his presence and in the look which he gave her, telling her that he knew.

Of late years he was in constant attendance on his master, for whom his attachment seemed to increase with time ; it was his custom to hover about the courts when not in the judge's retiring-room, so as to be at hand in case he was wanted, which case occurred only in his own imagination. He did not so much as suggest that Lady Marlowe should leave that painful scene ; he merely watched her with his unobtrusive, dog-like fidelity, and brought her

water and wine and biscuits when he thought proper.

Mr. Luscombe saw that some strong feeling underlay the judge's calmly stern exterior, but was far from divining its cause ; he saw, too, that the judge was for the defence ; he had often heard that to gain the judge was to gain the cause, so he was glad and confident. Mr. Simeon also thought the judge convinced of the prisoner's innocence ; this surprised and piqued him into stronger efforts to prove her guilt. The junior counsel, Mr. Sayer, was still of opinion that Mr. Justice Marlowe, as usual, held his judgment in reserve.

The wood-cutter, the first witness, had been working in Weston Wood every day for some time before and after the 10th ; on that afternoon he saw the prisoner enter and leave the wood ; he spoke to her ; she stopped at his cottage on her return and obtained a glass of water from his wife, who then observed her evident distress. He had that afternoon seen her sitting on the

felled tree near the pool alone, with the child in her arms. He observed no one else enter the wood ; he had been at work near the gate on the Lesscombe side all the afternoon. Weston Wood was a favourite picnicking place, but was little visited in the dead of winter. Of course, it was admitted, people might have entered the wood-path from the opposite side near the lonely farmhouse ; there was a by-road from another highroad on that side : this led across the field to this farm and thence through Weston Wood to the Lesscombe road. Yet no one had been seen to approach the wood from that side on that afternoon.

None of the farm people had ever seen the prisoner. When Cicely asked for water at the wood-cutter's cottage on the Lesscombe side, she was trembling, her clothes were torn and clayey ; she said she had slipped and fallen in the dusk. The wood-cutter had found bits of baby clothes, identified by Mrs. Dickson, among the brushwood, and, lying near the black pool among the fern between the post and the felled

trunk, a broken string of beads. The witness dropped his bill-hook into the pool and in searching for it found the dead baby. The weather was mild and the ground soft on the 10th. It froze on the next night. Near the pool there was a footprint, frost-hardened, into which a shoe of Cicely's fitted. The beads found in the bracken were part of a silver-linked ebony chaplet with a crucifix attached, known to her employers as Cicely's, known also to the woman in charge of the child as having been placed, without the cross, which was afterwards found in Cicely's possession, on the child's neck on that afternoon.

The broken chaplet with the crucifix was produced. A dimmed and moted sunbeam struck on the silver mounting and made it sparkle as it had sparkled years ago from the snow-drift at Cottesloe, as it had sparkled years ago in the bright summer sunshine in Brittany.

It was handed to the Bench ; the judge took both crucifix and broken chaplet in

his hands and examined them attentively. He read on the back of the crucifix the long-delayed message of forgiveness, the word 'Pardon,' and sighed. Placing the twice-broken rosary on the desk before him, he looked at the prisoner with a strained, long gaze, and sighed again more heavily.

Cynthia watched him, trembling painfully, half rising as if to go to his assistance, feeling that all was over with him. But the trial went on, the judge apparently listening as usual. Five minutes passed—they seemed hours to Cynthia—and then, a fresh witness being about to be called, the judge, whose face was gray and sad, though composed, rose and entered his retiring-room, the door of which was close to his hand.

Then Cynthia, unable to contain herself longer, drew down her veil and went to the retiring-room by the other door, conducted thither by the faithful servant. Some five minutes were occupied in passing round to the entrance; and even then

admittance was not at once gained. But at last she was admitted. The judge himself opened the door and looked at her with grave but calm inquiry, while she tried to speak, and could not for exceeding agitation. She divined that he had passed beyond the reach of her help and sympathy, and that she was left behind alone.

‘Dear,’ he said at last, in his deep voice, answering all she would have said in a few words, ‘leave me—you cannot help me. The justice of God has overtaken me; nothing but His mercy can be of any avail now.’

Saying this in solemn, measured tones, as unimpassioned in their utter misery as those of a suffering soul speaking from beyond the tomb might be, he turned and left her, shutting the door with a sound that extinguished hope.

Was this man, who inspired her with a vague awe, almost horror, indeed her husband, Cecil Marlowe, the man she had loved and honoured, pitied and despised, and forgiven? This ermined judge, look-

ing taller than he was in his robes, to which she was unaccustomed, towered above her with a strange and terrible majesty; there was an incomprehensible something in the features set in solemn agony, and the deep voice devoid of all feeling, that she had never before known, and before which she trembled. His drawn face and deep-sunken, brilliant eyes gave him an unfamiliar aquiline look; when he turned from her she felt cast away and blotted out of his life.

Perhaps this virtual dismissal from a share in his dreadful sorrow was the keenest pain Cynthia ever received from her husband; her heart stood still and her blood froze beneath it. He had turned away of his own will from the unloved, he was now obliged to turn from the beloved. She heard the door close sharply behind him; she felt stunned, crushed, and incredulous; nothing she could do could possibly reach him now; nothing could spare him the stern horror before him.

‘Robert! Robert!’ she cried, catching at

the faithful servant's arm to steady herself in the sick whirl of dismay that swept over her, 'what will he do?—what can he do? He cannot try—he cannot sentence his own child!'

'He may get her let off,' Bob replied gruffly; but Cynthia did not hear; her anguish overpowered her, and she lost consciousness.

In the meantime the judge had again taken his seat on the bench. The familiar scene before him now seemed unfamiliar in the horror that brooded over it; dusty sunbeams struggling through the dim windows athwart the murky atmosphere had a dull red glow; there was a strange light on the faces turned towards him—sordid, unlovely, vulgar faces most of them; there was something demoniacal in the aspect of the Bar and the solicitors and in the whispered colloquies between these and their attendant clerks; the jurors' faces had a sinister look; the heavy odour of the unwashed public and the breath of many lungs was dizzying; a stifled laugh between

whispering reporters had a mocking sound. There was even a strange lustre in the beauty of the prisoner facing him, distinct and partly touched by a dimmed sunbeam.

She looked up straight in his face when he resumed his seat on the bench ; her look cut him to the heart, for it was the look of the little disowned child who had first clung to him, babbling 'papa,' and then shrunk frightened and chilled away from his cold glance. The same shy, instinctive shrinking had set him against the baby ; but how should this accused girl look upon her judge except with shrinking ? Still, it seemed unnatural to find neither love nor trust in the gaze of his own child, though he had never loved or cherished her. A mighty wave of pity swelled within him as he listened to the witness whose evidence was condemning her, and remembered that the lost girl had been dear and her birth welcome to only one human being, long since mouldered in her grave.

The broken rosary still lay on the desk before him ; it was a straw at which he

thought the defence would catch and cling to. For Cicely would not have taken this sure means of identifying her child had she intended to kill it. And this, properly set forth by the defence, might save her.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEFENCE.

WHEN Lady Marlowe came to herself again, she went back to the court to see the end. She first sent a note to Mr. Luscombe, 'Save this girl, for God's sake, for the sake of all you hold dear. She *must* not be found guilty.'

The note amazed him. How could he save her if proved guilty? and how could the wife of Mr. Justice Marlowe suppose that a barrister would not do his utmost to defend his client? and why was Lady Marlowe present and so deeply interested in this young woman? He was unusually interested in his client himself. He was young and chivalrous, and madly in love;

therefore all women, especially the young and beautiful, were objects of tenderness and interest to him. Besides, there was something about Cicely Rennie that suggested Cissie Marlowe to her lover: he did not like to call it a likeness, it was more an air, a poise of the head, certain tones, and, in particular, a quick, shy way of looking up and down again. Had Lady Marlowe observed what he thought too subtle for any but a lover's eye to discover? The prisoner's resemblance to her judge did not strike him until afterwards; it is a long reach of imagination to compare the soft young face of a beautiful and uneducated girl with the strong masculine features of a mature man of cultivated intellect; besides he had never seen the subtler qualities of the judge's face, the memories of youth traced in sympathetic ink there.

In addition to this natural bias to the unfortunate young woman whose life was staked upon the issue of the day, he was convinced of her innocence—why, he could scarcely explain to himself, much less

demonstrate to others, but he was sure that something lurked behind that the prisoner would not reveal.

‘She was always a limb,’ Cynthia heard a dingy, elderly woman just in front of her mutter to another, ‘a come-by-chance my master picked out of the gutter and bred up for his own. She run off after the circus-people, and there we seen her afterwards dancing a-horseback with no petticoats to speak of, as bold as brass. Then she turned light-fingered and run off from they when found out. I always said as she was bound to go wrong. ’Tis in the blood of the likes of she.’

This in a raucous whisper, tainted with gin and onions, came to Lady Marlowe’s strained ear and divided her attention painfully with the witness under examination; she saw this woman go out of court and return, drawing the back of her hand across her mouth, many times during the day.

Cicely’s mistress and her blind husband witnessed to prisoner’s good character,

quiet demeanour, and long service ; they had taken her characterless, ragged, and destitute, when she was trying to sell matches in the streets. At that time she had recently come out of the workhouse after an illness of some months. She quickly made herself useful and beloved, and became a sort of companion and reader to her master, and a kind of lady's-maid to his daughters. She had spoken frankly of her past life. She had asked for no holiday until about a year before the visit to Lesscombe, when she had one whole day for a country excursion. She had no followers. No one at Woodleigh suspected that she had not been visiting her old fellow-servant at Lesscombe in November ; she had even written a letter with that address while actually at Mrs. Dickson's in the same town. When charged with the murder she had been surprised, but not alarmed. When taxed with it, she acknowledged the birth of her child and having given a false name, but maintained that she was married, to whom

or where she declined to say, nor would she say to whom she had given her child; the dead baby was not hers. The Woodleigh servants were aware that she received letters from some unknown correspondent, and always contrived to anticipate the postman's knock and take them in herself. A daily paper containing a paragraph describing the finding of the dead baby in Weston Wood had been seen in Cicely's hands. She looked through the paper as usual before reading it to her master; but she did not read that paragraph aloud. After that she went to her room, in which a fellow-servant afterwards found a pile of burnt and charred written papers in the grate.

On the afternoon of January 10 she was dressing her child by Mrs. Dickson's sitting-room fire, when a neighbour dropped in and saw the beads wound twice round the child's neck beneath its cloak. The neighbour looked curiously at the prisoner, who rose and finished dressing the child in an adjoining bedroom. The neighbour then

told Mrs. Dickson that she recognised the young woman as her husband's adopted child, Cicely Rennie, and that she had run away from them and been known as Mademoiselle Zéphyrine in a circus company, from which she had been turned away for misconduct.

Here the judge interposed to ask what that had to do with the question, upon which Mr. Sykes Simeon replied that the prisoner's antecedents bore strongly upon the case.

Mr. Sykes Simeon had a strong case, as he and his junior informed the jury : motive, probability, possibility, circumstantial evidence. The baby was taken into the wood by its mother, beyond all doubt ; it was beyond all doubt left there. No one else was in the wood at the time ; the prisoner was tracked by the footprints and broken beads to the pool in which the body was found ; she was showing every sign of guilt when leaving Weston Wood ; she was not a credible or well-conducted person, and the accounts she gave of the

afternoon's work were not only incredible but also irreconcilable one with another.

All this Mr. Sykes Simeon put before the jury in his final address with his accustomed skill and lucidity, hovering above the bar as he spoke, like a black-winged bird of prey, and giving, according to his habit when warming to his work, a succession of pushes to his wig, till it gradually became tilted to one side and occasionally toppled off, when it was caught with amazing dexterity, silently replaced, and gradually pushed off again without a sign of discomposure on Mr. Sykes Simeon's part.

This effect Mr. Luscombe was never tired of sketching, but this time it was for the benefit of Miss Cissie Marlowe. He put in a few last touches, exaggerating the heavy cavalry moustache that suited so ill with Mr. Sykes Simeon's wig, before he rose to open the defence ; then he glanced at the corner in which Lady Marlowe sat, as if to reassure her.

He admitted his client's carrying the child into the wood and returning agitated

without it. It was impossible to prove a negative ; the fact that no one had been seen to enter the wood from the other side and take the child away was by no means inconsistent with such an occurrence. There was no evidence as to who drowned the child found in the pool nor exact evidence as to the day on which it was drowned ; the evidence as to its identity with the prisoner's child was merely presumptive. Motive for a crime so serious and so inconsistent with the prisoner's character was entirely wanting. A gentle, amiable, and well-conducted young woman, showing great affection for her baby—a young woman who had maintained a blameless reputation in most trying surroundings ; for only the vaguest and most unsatisfactory evidence cast any reproach on her, prior to her taking service at Woodleigh—was in the last degree unlikely to do fatal violence to her own child. The fear of shame was not present. She had contracted a secret marriage, or what she believed to be such, and had a motive for

temporarily concealing the child's birth. She maintained that she had given it into the hand of a relative—why not its father? since it was objected that the child had no other known relatives. That unknown father was evidently in circumstances far above those of the prisoner. A naked babe of three months could not easily be identified. This child had been in the water many days. The prisoner had been unmoved at the sight of it; she had denied its being hers; she had spoken of a peculiarity in her own child not found in the drowned baby. If she intended to kill her child, why did she place the peculiar and well-known beads upon it first? The beads were broken; one half she kept, the other half she had, by her own account, placed on the child. She had no doubt dropped her own half by the pool when taking out her handkerchief to bathe her face after her fall in the dusk, which would be very thick within the wood between half-past four and five on an evening in January. As for burning her letters after reading aloud from

the paper which contained the account of the discovery in Weston Wood, that action, though ill-advised, was quite consistent with innocence, and arose from the desire she had shown all through to keep her marriage secret. She must have known that it was dangerous to have been seen carrying a child through Weston Wood about that time, especially a child which, being now beyond the seas, as she had said, it was impossible to produce.

Besides, there was no evidence that she had seen the paragraph or burnt the papers, beyond the fact that ashes of written paper were found in the grate, and there was no evidence that they were letters or the prisoner's property. Her silence as to the husband's name was only consistent with a wife's loyalty. That unknown husband and father might be out of reach and hearing of the present necessity, or, what was highly probable, he might be a heartless blackguard and only too glad to be rid of a tie of which he had wearied. No woman in her senses, if guilty, would

have left the baby's wardrobe with the woman who had had charge of it. To find a verdict against the prisoner in this case was to find that she not only committed an impossible and causeless act of cruel violence, but that she took the utmost pains to fasten the guilt of that act upon herself. Such, briefly put, was the substance, duly supported by witnesses, duly examined, cross-examined, and re-examined, of Mr. Luscombe's defence.

When he had finished, a folded paper was sent to him, through several hands, by Mr. Sayer. Eagerly opening it, he found a sketch of Mr. Sykes Simeon with wig at vanishing-point, nothing more.

Cynthia's head swam as she listened with strained attention, tortured and distracted by a maddening desire to set Mr. Sykes Simeon's wig straight. And as her own hopes rose and fell she wondered if Cicely, to whom much that was dark to her counsel must be clear, experienced similar alternations of feeling; she gazed, fascinated by sympathy and pity, upon the

young woman's face, of which she could, from her position, only see the profile, and sometimes only the beautiful line of cheek and throat continued from the forehead and passing just beyond the delicate ear; but she could clearly see her hands resting on the edge of the dock, and these were eloquent as the judge's in their nervous movements.

But sometimes Lady Marlowe's intense interest in Cicely's touching personality distracted her attention even from her trial, and her thoughts wandered off into speculations on the girl's early life and upbringing, so that she occasionally lost the thread of the terribly interesting argument. Then a fly, beguiled by premature summer hopes, came buzzing frivolously in the polluted sunbeams and dingy shadows; it made perpetual raids upon Mr. Sykes Simeon's indignant nose; it hummed about the prisoner's face, returning again and again with fussy pertinacity; finally it hung itself up in Mr. Luscombe's wig, whence it was captured and doomed to death in an inkpot.

This light-hearted winged creature carried Cynthia's thoughts out to the peace and sunny purity of open fields, over which wild birds hovered in pellucid air, to the clear spring sky, the happy bursting of sweet primrose buds, the gentle, gradual uncrumpling of variously curled and crisped leafage in the genial rush of youth and life at their eternal renewal, to pleasant song-filled copses, through which her own Cissie was roaming on that sunny day, innocent, free and happy, while 'the other Cissie, the poor Cissie,' stood through the long hours closely guarded in the dismal court to be tried for her life.

Was the pale young prisoner thinking of pleasant fields and woods, of wild-flowers and singing-birds she would never more see? She looked tired as she rested lightly on the edge of the dock, listening to the dispute over her life with flagging interest. Two quarrelling sparrows dashed against the wire-bound windows, loudly scolding, twittering and fluttering, while counsel for the prosecution was finally ad-

dressing the jury with sadly disarranged wig ; the prisoner looked up and followed the sparrows' movements with drooping, weary mouth and wistful eyes.

‘ Oh for the wings, the wings of a dove !’ Cicely seemed to hear a beautiful boy-treble singing in an old cathedral.

As the day went on the court filled. It had been rumoured abroad that the once well-known Zéphyrine—a few years since so often seen glittering through Alcaster streets, now in white satin in a nautilus shell, drawn by twelve tiny ponies, now in Eastern costume on a camel, now sitting by a chained lion, her small hand on its mane—was being tried for her life. Witnesses, escaping the vigilance of guardian police, and solacing themselves at adjacent but more festive bars, had spoken of mysterious and inexplicable circumstances connected with the trial. Woodleigh and Lesscombe were both within reach of the county town, whence it was possible to go gipsying in Weston Wood. It was market day, and the town full of country folk

with spare time on their hands ; all sorts of people kept surging in, like an overwhelming wave of destiny, upon the prisoner, as if to sweep her out of existence. So the day wore on, and counsel contended on either side for her life.

Dark rings gradually circled Cicely's large and lustrous eyes, her features sharpened, and grew more like Cecil's ; the full, deep crimson of her lips was marred by black patches of drouth ; she held herself less and less upright and leant oftener on the ledge before her. The judge's face grew sharper and grayer, the nervous movement of his hands more frequent, his eyes blazed in their sunken sockets ; ten years seemed added to his age.

Prosecution and defence came at last to an end ; evidence had been sifted to the utmost ; the long day was approaching its close ; it only remained for the able and experienced judge to sum up.

But Mr. Justice Marlowe did not begin to sum up with his accustomed prompti-

tude ; he remained gazing with eyes that saw nothing external, straight before him past the prisoner's slight figure silhouetted against the dingy slate-colour of the farthest wall. The heads of the Bar beneath him approached each other, tossing like some strange species of gray cabbage endowed with motive power ; a hum of conversation rose from the body of the court and was suppressed ; a bugle rang out clear and joyous from a part of the building used as barracks ; the measured tramp of a party of soldiers was heard on the gravelled enclosure outside the courthouse windows ; farther off, the roll of wheels rose and fell, and rose again ; a barrel-organ was drowsily droning out 'Ah chère la Morte ;' a baby was screaming in an adjacent street, and pigeons were cooing tranquilly on the sunny architrave without. All these sounds seemed impressive and important to Cecil, as if heard before in some great crisis ; but over and through them all was the sound of the sea, thundering on the surf-fringed Breton coast, break-

ing in mellow music at the foot of Swanbourne cliffs ; now the many-leagued roar of the ground-swell, now the harsh scream of its back-draught over the dragged shingle ; now louder, now softer, but always the sea.

The wigged heads in front of him wavered more and more : now they looked like some horrid growth of goblin fungus ; the great dust-coated gaselier, hanging from the ceiling, swayed as if about to fall ; the sea of reddish faces turned towards him was blended in a dizzy blur.

He opened his lips ; they were stiff and dry ; no sound issued from his parched mouth. A hum of conversation rose from the court, was silenced, rose again, and was once more stilled. He drank a tumbler of cool water, and again tried to begin.

Below, in her distant corner, Cynthia sat, with her face covered, silently praying.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUMMING-UP.

THE scene before the judge gradually became distinct and steady, the sea of faces calmed, the dingy gaselier hung motionless; signs of fatigue and mental trouble became more apparent in the prisoner. The hard face of Mrs. Dickson, the sour and evil visage of the witness, the wife of Cicely's adopted father, from whom she had run away in her childhood, the low, cunning look of the man who deposed that Cicely was to have been dismissed for misconduct from the circus company, the stolid countenances of the rural police, the weather-beaten faces of the woodcutter and his wife, showed clearly; a clock over the

gateway struck with a deep boom, and set other clocks in the town chiming. The jury looked impatient, the Bar restless; even the javelin-men, warders and police seemed to protest silently against the delay.

Then Cecil remembered how, as a boy, the nervous excitement of having to recite before an audience made him violently sick; the trivial memory, with the accompanying sensation of nausea, would keep intruding with another equally irrelevant, his first sight of Cicely, a crumpled, crying, copper-coloured scrap of superfluous humanity. But at last he made one strong and final effort to conquer and compose himself, and began his summing-up.

The sound of his own voice, steady, clear and resonant, gave him confidence and calm; his brain cleared, his ideas arranged themselves in orderly sequence, he felt that he had risen above personal things and would be able to do the stern duty of his office. That intense desire which is the father of so much illogical thought, together with the development of

the case, had by this time brought him to believe in the innocence, or at least the legal innocence, of the prisoner at the bar : all he had to do now was to arrange the sifted evidence and arguments for and against the guilt of the accused, with linking comments, in such a manner as to bring the minds of the jury to a similar conviction. That was all, that was nothing ; and yet he trembled all over, and yet he wished he had never been born.

The Bar yawned ; they were fairly sure of the issue, and wished the judge would bring the case to an end. Mr. Sayer was thinking of the next case. Mr. Sykes Simeon had adjusted his wig, and was pencilling notes ; Mr. Luscombe was reflecting on his defence, and thinking how much simpler it would have been with the prisoner in the witness-box. Mr. Smithson, solicitor for the defence, was wishing he could have instructed counsel more fully, when something unfamiliar in the familiar tones of the judge arrested and riveted their attention to the end.

He began by praising counsel on each side. Nothing had been left undone to enable the jury to perform the most solemn and important duty a British subject could fulfil—to pronounce upon the guilt or innocence of a fellow-creature, arraigned before a legal tribunal for a capital crime. They were not to bring a human being under the power of the criminal law unless that person's guilt was fully established beyond all reasonable doubt. It was not in the nature of things human that any man could know the whole truth about anything. But if they were convinced that a thing was true after due consideration, after duly sifting the evidence, they were bound to act on that conviction. They were not to shrink from their duty, however painful; they were to be deterred by no consideration of the prisoner's youth and temptations, her most unfortunate up-bringing, her neglected childhood and unfriended youth. Such considerations would plead for her at a higher tribunal; in the light of Divine and unerring justice,

such considerations might, he thought they would, wholly absolve her, placing the guilt on others—on those responsible for the soul they had launched on the sea of this troubled world, and left helpless and unguarded to drift at the mercy of its cruel waves.

The duty that lay upon them was to decide whether the prisoner at the bar was or was not guilty of the wilful murder of *her own child*. It was a very terrible thing to see a young creature like the prisoner, singularly endowed with natural gifts, a soft, frail woman, credited by those who knew her with an amiable and gentle disposition—a terrible thing to see this young, tender creature charged with a crime so awful, a deed so merciless and so unnatural, as the wilful murder of her own helpless babe. The woman who would do that must indeed be in desperate straits. One so friendless, ill-taught, and dangerously gifted as the prisoner might only too easily have brought herself into a position that was intolerable as long as her living

child bore witness to it. Such an one was, indeed, to be pitied, for what is so terrible as shame? but such an one was not to be excused. The law of the land, based on that higher law which demands life for life, declared that such a criminal, however sorely tempted, however cruelly misled, however desperate with misery, must *die*. This with solemn emphasis, followed by a long, long pause.

Therefore, if the jury were indeed convinced that the evidence before them convicted the prisoner at the bar, they must find a verdict accordingly. They must dismiss all feeling and prejudice from their minds, and remember that the one and only question before them was: Did Cicely Mar—Cicely Rennie—the prisoner at the bar, drown a child in a certain pool in Weston Wood on the afternoon of the 10th of January last?

To that end they must weigh the sifted evidence before them. It was quite clear that, between three and four o'clock on the afternoon mentioned, the prisoner carried

her own child into Weston Wood ; it was quite clear that she returned without it, and in a distressed condition, which might be accounted for by her own narration of her actions. It was also quite clear that she had stood on the edge of the pool on that afternoon, and quite clear that an infant of the same sex and apparent age as hers had been found drowned in that pool some days later. But it was by no means clear that it was the prisoner's child, though the presumptive evidence to that effect was strong. Counsel for the defence had ably dwelt upon this, and upon the fact that though a peculiarity in the prisoner's child was asserted only by the prisoner, and denied by the woman who had charge of it, the latter would naturally have observed the infant's body less closely than its mother would have done.

So he commented on the quality of the evidence, and the leading points in the prosecution and defence, dwelling strongly on the inadequacy of motive, if the prisoner were indeed married, which the prosecution

had denied. The defence had maintained the existence of the secret marriage, reasonably suggesting the absence of the nameless husband, his presumed ignorance of the present case, his supposed higher rank and probable strong motives for temporary secrecy. The loyalty of a wife was a strong thing, a very strong thing.

The judge paused; Cynthia saw that his hand rested on the crucifix on which Renée's pardon was inscribed, and that the fevered brilliance of his eyes was softened. One wild, swift pang of jealousy went through her; she seemed to see the frozen hand reaching out of the grave after all these years. Yet it was right. That poor girl had been his true wife; the rights of a wife were still hers.

Such loyalty to the letter, the judge continued, might and often did produce disastrous results; but it existed, to the lasting honour of human nature, and, in forming a just estimate of human action, it had to be taken into account. He dwelt

further upon the counsel's suggestion that the prisoner's infant might have died in the wood, in which case many motives would have led to the concealment of the body and clothing. But the rosary, he pointed out, was the strongest point against deliberate slaying of the child, while such passionate, unpremeditated killing as constitutes manslaughter was impossible in the case of an unconscious infant.

'Gentlemen of the jury,' he said in conclusion, 'the case is before you. Your plain duty is before you. It is important and solemn, but simple and clear. You must allow no one to suffer under the criminal law unless you are irresistibly, positively, and affirmatively convinced beyond all reasonable doubt of that person's guilt. On the other hand, it is your most sacred duty to allow no guilty person to go free.'

The judge's agitation became increasingly and painfully evident as he spoke these words, the last of which died away in a toneless, sibilant whisper ; this agitation was magnetic ; it pervaded the court,

every creature in which became vaguely conscious of something unusual and terrible underlying the judge's singular emotion.

In an awe-filled silence, which made their movements audible, the jury retired. The court waited during what seemed an eternity. The judge hesitated before retiring, and rose with difficulty; he was shivering; his face became grayer and more drawn, till it was hardly recognisable. A long rod of ruddy sunshine, which had made his scarlet blaze in vivid, quivering light during his last words, shot upwards, touching the royal arms on the canopy and making the gilded '*Dieu et mon droit*' glitter fierily.

The prisoner, whose hands were nervously clasped in the same way as the judge's, looked up at this last ray of sunlight; if it faded before the jury returned, she thought, so would her life go out in darkness; if it flickered on, she would live. Her lips parted, her breath came thickly, her eyes were fixed on the changing sunbeam and the burning words '*Dieu et*

mon droit.' The sunbeam flickered up and away over the rampant gold lion, over the English leopards, over the crown of England, then shot in crimson intensity on to the dingy ceiling, where it was suddenly quenched, leaving the gray building grayer and the masses of gathering shadow heavier.

The clock ticked out ten minutes of oppressive silence and suspense; a gun boomed the set of sun; when its echoes had died away, the steps of the jury were heard returning, and all eyes were directed to their box.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VERDICT.

TWELVE good men and true, commonplace, respectable British citizens, concerned daily with buying and selling and harassed by petty domestic and business cares, but to day charged with the tragic burden of life and death, as august, as ominous, as weighted with doom as a chorus of Fates or of Furies in a Greek drama, the jurors re-entered their box, their faces inscrutable in the shadows, their bearing impressive and solemn in its very impassiveness.

Then a voice rose from the gloom, addressing these twelve arbiters of life and death.

‘Are you agreed upon your verdict?’

Whereupon, without delay, the foreman replied, 'Yes,' the short, dry monosyllable sounding harsh to Cynthia, ominous to the prisoner, and giving the judge the horrible nausea of intense emotion and terror.

'Do you,' continued the voice from the darkness, 'find the prisoner, Cicely Rennie, guilty or not guilty of the wilful murder of her infant child?'

Every ear was strained to listen; every heart, even the most hardened, was magnetically influenced by the atmosphere overcharged with terrible emotion; every creature present was conscious of some slight shuddering, when the foreman replied in a steady, distinct voice, every tone of which pierced, overweighted with despair, through the judge's inmost soul:

'We find her guilty.'

The prisoner gave a slight start, a movement like that of a horse under a sudden lash. Three or four of the policemen and warders, who had entered shortly before, moved forwards and closed round

the dock. There arose from the court that subdued, inarticulate murmur perceptible in a numerous assembly suddenly relieved from emotional tension, indistinct and complex as the hum of many insects on a summer evening; and then a strange and terrible thing happened—it was the sudden shrilling cry, in a voice strained and discordant with anguish: ‘My child, my own child!’

Whence did it arise? No one was certain. Some thought it was from the prisoner, in sudden remorse for her detected guilt; others maintained that it was from the judge, but that seemed madness. People started and turned, looking in every direction to see who had given that shrilling cry. It was followed by a ghastly, palpitating silence, broken after a few seconds by a voice from the shadows addressed to the prisoner, and asking if she had anything to say against sentence being passed upon her. Then the prisoner’s young and well-toned voice, silent during all those weary hours,

was heard for the second time that day, quivering to the very quick of her judge's heart, stirring again all the memories of his life, filling him with such distraction and dismay that he could scarcely grasp the meaning of her words in the dizziness that made the court seem to be rushing wildly round and round.

‘Only that I am innocent,’ replied that young voice, pathetic in its freshness and treble contrast to the men's bass notes.

‘Come away,’ Bob Ryall whispered to his mistress.

The gloom had now gathered so deeply that little jets of light were being kindled here and there in the darkest places, though a faint pinkness was still visible in the highest panes of the tall dim windows. This lighting caused a slight stir, which was succeeded by another terrible silence, only broken by faint sounds from without: the rumble of distant wheels, the shouts and laughter of children at play, and, suddenly passing close to the court-house window, the flute-voice of a boy, a soldier's

child, singing clearly in the voluptuousness of untasted sorrow :

‘ Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky !
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot ;
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not—remembered not.
Sing heigh ho ! the green holly !
This life is most jolly.’

After the first faint quiver beneath the shock of her doom, the prisoner braced herself with instinctive, inherited pride to meet her sentence without shrinking. She straightened her slender figure and looked with calm, steadfast gaze at the bench, her well-poised head erect and steady. A curious insensibility stole upon her ; she seemed to have lost interest in the proceedings. She found herself dwelling upon an old, old memory buried in the shadows of early infancy, one of those dim, fairylike memories that seem like dreams. Cold and shivering, she was in a warm and spacious place before a blazing fire. A white-haired man, in black, and changing into a gray-

beard with long flowing locks and a quaint costume, stood prominent among many figures. A dark-eyed woman, in whose velvet lap she rested, was also there; she changed into a woman in a flapping white cap by a turning wheel; a dark, stern man repelled and frightened her; he was associated with the word 'father;' the spicy odour of burning turf mixed with that of flowers and leather hangings. It was passing strange to Cicely that those memories should intrude in a moment so awful and circle round the face of the stern man about to condemn her to death.

When the judge and prisoner thus confronted each other in the darkest moment of each life, their similarity of feature and expression became markedly apparent, and the awful nature of the tragedy enacted before them was partially divined by those present. Mr. Luscombe now guessed that he had been defending the sister of the girl he loved; others were perplexed with vague surmise.

‘He can never do this thing,’ Cynthia murmured through blanched lips.

The joyous boy-voice died away ; the child danced by ; the sharp tap of drum and shrill fife-squeak proclaimed the arrival of acrobats in the adjacent square. The court was silent.

It would have been easier to the judge if he had not seen Cicely quail beneath the verdict — that slight movement of the fragile young form so full of beautiful life and promise was too piteous ; it branded her utter helplessness too deeply upon his heart. Her present proud bearing, which revealed the gentle strain that came through him, made it still harder. But if he failed, leaving her to receive sentence another day from another judge, it would but put her to fresh torture. His childish terror of the *Dies Iræ* was realized at last : the trump of doom sounded its heart-stirring blast in his ear ; he was being judged quick as others are dead. Was his child’s doom righteous ? The grudged, neglected and misused life which had

sprung from his, and which it was his miserable doom to sentence to death, had awakened no love in him—why should his unloved child's child kindle love in her? Who could tell how far such repulsion as he felt to his offspring might have gone in that tempted, lonely young heart towards hers?

If she would but look down, and not torture him by the soft and steady gaze from which his mother's eyes and his darling child's looked out! For a few moments of awful silence, during which the continuous roar of storm-beaten seas thundered in his ears and these thoughts surged through his heart, he paused. Slowly then he assumed the terrible emblem of his most terrible office—*he put on the black cap.*

At this hope died in his daughter's heart and she saw the shadows of death visibly descend upon her; she became a little paler and shivered perceptibly. And then, in a voice which penetrated to the marrow of all present, and in a manner which none ever forgot, Mr. Justice Mar-

lowe pronounced his last sentence in these words :

‘Cicely Rennie, you have been found guilty, according to the laws of your country, and after patient trial before a jury of your countrymen, of one of the most terrible crimes it is possible to commit—the wilful murder of the helpless creature to which you gave life, and which depended solely upon you for its cherishing and nourishing. Not the physical life alone, but the well-being and careful up-bringing of a child, is required by high Heaven at the hands of those by whose lawful or unlawful actions it is called into a being it never desired. It is a terrible thing to lightly incur parental responsibility; it is still more terrible to neglect such responsibility; to destroy the life once lent, most terrible of all. It is possible that you may be innocent of this fearful crime. God grant that you are! Human tribunals are fallible; all the facts connected with this cruel tragedy are not known to those who have found you guilty here. But all are

known to that Judge and Father'—a long pause and deep sigh—'that Judge and Father before whom you must shortly appear, whose mercy is infinite as His justice is unerring. A certain time will be granted you, in which to prepare for that dread tribunal. God in His infinite mercy grant that you may pass that time in repentance and eternal hope. You have never known the tenderness or softening influence of parental care'—this in a broken and tremulous voice. 'Those who called you into being, and suffered you to drift at the world's mercy, are guilty of heavy sin against you. Your own sin or the sin of another may have made you desperate, and thus hardened your heart against your own little child. Guilty or not guilty in the sight of Heaven, you are guilty in the eyes of the law of this realm. It is, therefore, my duty, my bitter, bitter duty, to pronounce sentence of death upon you. I cannot do otherwise. Would to God I could! Would to God that sentence might be passed on me in your stead!'

Another pause, during which faint murmurs of amazement surged round the court, and were silenced. Then the judge uttered the well-known words: 'That you be taken hence—to the place—whence you came—and that you be hanged by the neck—until you are—*dead*!'—this word, in a deeper voice, made him shake and shudder like a reed in the wind—'and that your body—be buried within the precincts of the prison in which you shall have last been confined after your conviction. And may the Lord—have mercy—mercy!'—this word in a loud cry.

Father and child, judge and prisoner, fell together at the same dreadful moment: the one senseless, in his ermine and scarlet, on the bench; the other, in her simple gray gown, in the dock.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRISON BARS.

THE wine was as good as usual, but the wit was inferior; the gaiety and light-heartedness characteristic of members of a learned profession when they unbend together in charmed seclusion from profane laity was absent from the mess: a skeleton sat at the feast, but it was not Mr. Luscombe, so called by his learned brothers from the extreme tenuity of his fleshly garb. Even the reflection that a seat on the bench had become vacant could not cheer leading counsel and those who wore the silk, much less those who did not.

‘And ye sall walk in silk attire,
And siller hae to spare,’

a learned brother prophesied to Mr. Horace Sayer, who sighed profoundly. 'The jurors' backs were set up by repeated imputations of sentiment, else they would have recommended her to mercy,' he observed gloomily.

A favourite report among the hundred different accounts of the tragedy was that Mr. Justice Marlowe, known to have an unusually strong repugnance to passing capital sentence, had given way under the strain of this last and gone raving mad. He had conducted the trial from the first in a very strange manner ; his wife, no doubt anticipating the breakdown of his overstrained mind, had actually been present in view of the emergency. He suffered from the singular delusion that the prisoner was his daughter, and, according to some people, from the more singular delusion that he was himself the prisoner and the prisoner his judge, and that he had himself received the sentence he was heard to pass. All were agreed that he

had not sufficient nerve for criminal courts ; he should have kept to equity.

Of course the story of the secret marriage surged from Heaven knows where, as such things always do. It was surmised that fear of exposure of the first, and consequent invalidation of the second, marriage had turned the man's brain. Again, it was said that there had been no marriage, but that Cicely Rennie was undoubtedly the judge's daughter, that he had tried to influence counsel unduly, and instruct solicitors falsely, and that he ought not to have sat in such a case. Some people maintained that he attempted suicide while giving judgment, because there was fresh blood on the ermine, but others ascribed this to a blow accidentally received in falling.

Well, it was all very shocking, and her Majesty had lost one of her ablest judges and the Bench one of the best of good fellows. The age was one of rush and hurry, the finest intellects succumbed in the struggle, hence the survival of the

unfittest. The town of Alcaster was roused to unwonted animation, every public-house, hotel and club being thronged, including those inexpensive free - and - easies frequented by the peripatetic sect that are always visible with pocketed hands at street-corners, and always within reach of liquid refreshment.

Mrs. Denham, the wife of Cicely's adopted father, awoke the morning after the trial to find herself famous, and had no difficulty in ministering without personal expense for days to come to a somewhat obstinate and chronic thirst with which she was troubled. The circus manager, though not afflicted, like that poor woman, with a complication of maladies, all of opposite characters but all agreeing in this of yielding to spirituous treatment, also awoke to find himself on the summit of local notoriety and the favourite of the populace.

As for poor Mr. Forde-Cusacke, that worthy gentleman was indeed to be commiserated. It was outrageous enough

that his step-daughter's step-daughter should appear in the dock on a criminal charge in his own county town, without the fiendish aggravation of this unprecedented and unimaginable misadventure occurring during his own shrievalty, a misadventure intensified by the fact that the judge who made so fearful an exposure of family affairs on the Bench was his wife's son-in-law. He was literally at his wits' end—not that it was a great distance to travel—he could not imagine what to do in this horrid and unexpected emergency. Why had he suffered himself to be beguiled by the expensive glitter of the High Sheriff's office? Bitterly did he regret the realization of his life-long ambition, and mourn being thus perked up in a glistening care and burdened with a golden sorrow. What were sheriff's uniform, state coach and sword, what the pomp of trumpeters and javelin men, what the honours and dignities of this high office, when one had to assist at the trial and con-

viction of one's wife's relations? And worse remained in store for him in virtue of his high estate.

He was so completely overcome by the miseries of his position and his inability to cope with circumstances, that he took to his bed as the last refuge of the unfortunate, whence neither remonstrance nor entreaty could dislodge him for days, holding with Mr. Shandy senior that grief can be supported best in a horizontal position.

‘This, my dear Emily,’ he moaned from that haven of distress, his bed, ‘is the most ungrateful of worlds. Consider the expense and trouble that this accursed shrievalty has entailed upon me! This is what comes of being public-spirited! This is the result of sacrificing leisure, retirement, wealth, to the common good! This is suffering for one's country with a vengeance! And what is my reward? My wife's relatives are brought to the scaffold. My wife's son-in-law is stricken with paralysis upon the very bench. The county rings with our family affairs. Never, my dear Emily,

never again ask me to accept the office of high sheriff,' he wailed, cosily drawing the bed-clothes round his chin.

'Certainly not,' replied Mrs. Forde-Cusacke, who never had. 'But don't you think, dear, that you would be able to bear it better if you sat up for a little while?'

'And if Marlowe dies, we shall of course be unable to entertain for months to come,' moaned the sufferer from a downy chasm in the pillows. 'Then, Cynthia and Cissie being at Melton makes it so much more public—emphasizes the misfortune. And how am I to appear at the Social Science Congress in the summer? Never again persuade me to be high sheriff, my dear—never again.'

The judge was lying at his lodgings, speechless and unconscious, apparently at the point of death. But Cynthia was told that the case was not hopeless, and watched for the first return of consciousness with mingled desire and dread. During that first long night by her husband's bed, it would have been a relief to her if the

feeble flame of his life had flickered out, as at first seemed probable ; but the morning brought its healthy renewal of life and hope with such power that she hoped even for her husband's darkened life, and began to feel her way towards some lifting of the dark shadow that had fallen upon them.

The prisoner was ignorant of her judge's fate, because she fainted on receiving sentence and was carried unconscious to her cell ; but for her the night passed in sweet oblivion and perfect rest ; sleep settled on her tired eyes like a brooding bird the moment she laid her head on the pillow. But the quiet night passed, the sweet sleep broke, and Cicely's spirit left the land of dreams, which, from the smile on her lips, must have been pleasant.

Shafts of yellow light pierced the narrow iron-barred window set high in the wall and touched the bare white wall opposite with live gold, quivering as if a heart beat in it. The sweetness of this morning sunshine gladdened her heart ; she rose, leaning upon her elbow, her eyes still hazed with

sleep and her mind dim with dreams, with a wandering gaze quickly darkened in pain, as the bare blank walls and the familiar prison sounds brought back the hard reality of yesterday's long waking nightmare.

Found guilty—sentenced to death !

She fell back with a faint moan and closed her eyes on the light she was so soon to see no more, and then, turning her face to the wall, wept sorrowfully and softly with long sighs, like a hurt child.

A pigeon steeped in sunlight flew by her narrow window with clattering wings, making a quick shadow on the sun-gilt wall within, and tracing a white radiance on the clear blue without. Cicely looked up ; the sight of the bird filled her with vague, irrational hope. Was it sent especially to comfort her, like the

‘Lovely bird, with azure wings
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me’ ?

She sprang from her bed, dressed herself, arranged and cleaned her cell, and ate her

prison fare with appetite. A warder's face appeared at the grating in the door from time to time ; the grim prison routine went on ; the clocks chimed from their airy towers in the town ; the sounds of free life floated up to her. The chaplain came, grave and pitiful, and exhorted her solemnly to examine her past life and repent, not only this terrible crime, but all that had ever been amiss in thought and deed. While he was exhorting her, the regiment marched out ; she heard the men's measured tramp, the bugles and drums, clarionets and oboes, and the chaplain's voice became a meaningless murmur. But she was sorry when the door closed on him.

Her thoughts flew to Rosemount. What were they doing there now ? Who would read to Captain Lewis ? Who would take care of his violin ? Who accompany him in his long walks ? Would any of them come to say good-bye to her ?

What dreary circles of thought must have turned and turned within those narrow walls, what evil memories polluted them,

what vain remorse and bitter regret thrilled them !

Exercise in the high-walled yard, whence nothing cheering but the square of blue above could be seen, was a relief ; food was a relief ; but time hung heavy, though every leaden moment ticked out a measurable portion of her life. She took up her Bible to read the penitential psalms marked by the chaplain, but a sentence in the Song of Songs caught her eye, and she read it from beginning to end, spell-bound, carried away by the breathless burst of ethereal passion, and, putting the book down, wept strongly but not bitterly.

The day ran its course ; night descended on the town in its stir and freedom, on the prison in its bonds and bitterness ; the hours chimed out on sick and whole, bond and free, poor and rich. Cicely counted the days to the probable date assigned by the chaplain, and slept once more on her prison-bed till the bugles sounded reveillé and the prison-bell boomed out. Once more she saw the sun turn the dead

white wall to living gold, once more heard the sounds of life from without, and the chaplain's voice within speaking of death and of life beyond death. Then in the afternoon a visitor came, by especial favour of those in authority, to her cell.

A pale, sweet face, the most beautiful eyes that ever were seen, a gentle and dignified bearing, a voice with tones that vibrated to the heart—of this and nothing more she was conscious as she rose, startled, to receive the unexpected, unknown guest. The latter raised a thick veil from her face and held out her hand, which Cicely suffered to take hers in its warm, soft clasp.

‘You wonder who I am, dear Cicely, and by what right I come here,’ the lady said, looking with a deep and earnest, but kind and even tender, gaze full into Cicely’s great bright, troubled eyes.

‘I thought no one could come,’ Cicely replied; ‘my friends—I mean my dear mistress—were only to be allowed to come

to a room where there is a barrier and warders.'

'An exception has been made in my favour, for I have a strong claim to see you alone,' replied the sweet voice, folding Cicely in a sort of charmed peace. 'Dear Cicely, I am your father's second wife. Your mother died in your infancy. The black rosary produced in court puts your identity beyond doubt.'

'Yes?' she replied drearily, for what would it avail her now to be a king's daughter, since she must soon die a shameful death? Yet she remembered that *he* had been so certain that she came of gentle-folk.

'You must think of me as your mother,' the lady said, taking the trembling girl in her arms; 'you must trust me, and you must not die, if by any possibility we can save you. Tell me all.'

'I am condemned. It is too late.'

'Not too late for a pardon. You are withholding essential evidence that would have acquitted you. Such evidence, Mr.

Smithson will tell you, if he has not done so already, would produce a pardon, though nothing can reverse a verdict.'

Cicely was overcome. No woman had ever embraced her before ; she let her head droop on the lady's shoulder ; a delicious feeling of security and rest fell upon her ; a faint fresh scent of lavender, dried roses and open air soothed her, like sea-air blowing over clover fields and thymy heaths. The voice speaking so kindly was like sea-music, the touch of cool lips on her hot cheek like the freshness of morning ; that such a lady should caress her was as if some great angel should fold her in his wings.

'Dear lady,' she said when she raised her head, 'then you don't think I did *that*—killed my own sweet baby ?'

'But you did wrong in leaving your counsel in ignorance. Why did you not say who took your child ? Where is he, Cicely ?'

'With his father. I said that.'

'But where and who is the father ?'

'I cannot say. I promised. We broke

the rosary. He took one half and I the other. I promised then.'

'Why does he not come forward and free you?'

'He cannot.'

'Cicely, I see innocence and truth in your eyes, but what you say is incredible. Your husband must know your peril.'

'He does not.'

'Then you must tell him; you should have told him long since.'

'I cannot. He is far, far away.'

'Where?'

'I must not say. I promised in the wood. If I said *where*, you would soon know who; my faith would be broken, and trouble and the disgrace of a felon-wife would come to him. He cannot help me.'

'Cicely, if you speak in this way, you must not wonder that you are held guilty. You *must* not die if innocent.'

Cicely made no reply, but the set of the full red lips warned Cynthia that persistence was vain. There was some mystery about this husband that could not be un-

ravelled without caution. She had taken a seat on the narrow bed by Cicely's side and was studying her face, which had a guarded look that she mistrusted; the more she looked at her the more fully convinced she was that this candid countenance concealed a complex nature of much subtlety and reserve.

It had been no easy task to Cynthia Marlowe, in spite of the pity with which the unfortunate girl inspired her, to take Renée's lost child to her heart as she had done. A singular repugnance, springing from unconscious jealousy and association with the one great sorrow of her life, struggled with that pity and the duty she owed her husband's child. Though she tried only to see Cecil's neglected daughter in this poor girl, Renée's child continually looked out of her large dark eyes and repelled her. But when she looked round the bare narrow cell and remembered the long anguish of that tragic trial and terrible doom, her heart went out to the prisoner in deepest compassion. Seeing

the futility of direct interrogation, she changed the subject, asking Cicely to tell her something of her life, beginning with her earliest memories, which she accordingly did, the veil of reticence falling from the now candid face.

‘It was I who gave the doll,’ Cynthia said, at the end of the dimly recalled episode at Cottesloe. ‘The dress was that of a Breton peasant. You had seen your grandfather, Michel Kérouac, in that dress ; that is why you called the doll Granpère. Your mother’s Christian name was Renée, which became Rennie. Your father——’

‘Where is my father ? If he was in the court, why does he not come and claim me ? And who is he ?’ Cicely suddenly asked.

‘He is very ill—dying, perhaps. Yes ; he gradually became sure of you during the trial.’

‘But who is he ?’

‘He is—he is—Sir Cecil Marlowe.’

‘*That man ?*’ cried Cicely, starting away from her—‘the judge ? The man who condemned me to death ?’

‘It was hard—hard, oh! it was cruel ;’ faltered Cynthia, catching her breath. ‘It—it has killed him. He hoped till the very end to save you. Cicely, your father, my husband, is dying.’

Cicely stood erect in the centre of the small cell, quivering and repeating mechanically : ‘Sir Cecil Marlowe—my father, the judge—Sir Cecil—Cicely—Cecil—The judge—dying—condemned!’

Then she turned and looked at Cynthia, sitting on the bed, pale and still, her beautiful eyes full of solemn and unspeakable grief, and with a rush of wild pity threw herself on her knees before her, weeping tempestuously with her face hidden in her lap.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MESSAGE.

THE days had flown by with incredible swiftness since Mr. Justice Marlowe's last and most terrible sentence had been pronounced on his own child. Chestnut-buds, then closed, now burst the glistening scales in which they had rested so cosily the winter long, and shook out fluttering pennons of bright-green; hedges turned from warm purple-brown to tender verdure that changed as one looked at it; sunbeams grew longer and stronger with relentless haste; the world's life and beauty increased from hour to hour, as the sands of Cicely's doomed life ran out.

The day of execution, already deferred

by Lady Marlowe's efforts, was now only eight days distant ; for the facts and arguments which those interested in Cicely Rennie had placed before the Home Secretary did not, in that dread official's opinion, justify either mitigation of sentence or further postponement of execution. Warned by her own communications under the spell of Lady Marlowe's presence, Cicely had been on her guard with her solicitor and her chaplain, both of whom did their utmost to persuade her to furnish the necessary clue to the mystery, and implored her not to suffer if innocent.

So she was firm as a rock, and her solicitor was ashamed to draw up the petition he was instructed to prepare on grounds so insufficient.

Now, when Cynthia left the gaol after that first, privileged interview, she had the history of Cicely's life up to the time of her entering the Lewises' service well arranged in her mind, but no means of bringing fresh evidence to light. She

now began to suspect some dark secret in connection with that winter afternoon in Weston Wood, perhaps even the crime of one too dear to the unfortunate young mother; she was still fully convinced that Cicely was incapable of harming her own child.

While watching the flickering flame of her husband's life from day to day, Cynthia pondered deeply on what his child had told her of her past life—namely this: her first distinct remembrance after the confused memories of infancy was of the little four-roomed house in which she had lived with her adopted father, the tin-smith, William Denham, and his wife, who, being childless, were kind to her. They had vainly tried to find out her relatives before adopting her. The man was sober and industrious, the woman clean and tidy. In due time they sent her to the Board school, where she picked up her only playfellows and learnt quickly, besides enjoying the pleasures of the streets. Those were happy days. But the woman died,

Cicely being about eight years old, and William married within the year.

Things went fairly well with the little girl till a baby was born ; then began the miserable world-old tale of the cruel step-mother—beatings, starvings, cold and drudgery. At first William shut his eyes to this for the sake of peace and for fear of his wife, but, growing weary of strife, gradually turned against the child as a stranger and the cause of her own misery and the dissension on his hearth. He did not himself ill-use her, but he had not the courage to interfere with his wife's ill-treatment, though it made him wretched and his conscience smote him. One whole night, with his miserable knowledge, Cicely, aged eleven, spent in the streets, locked out of his house. She was afraid to go home in the morning.

At mid-day Morden's Circus went round the town ; she followed it, and, when the procession broke up, crept unseen into one of the gilded cars. There she slept till night, when she was discovered and turned

out of her refuge. Then she told her piteous story and begged for food. Someone gave the hollow-eyed, bruised outcast some broken meat, and she passed that night watching the men strike the great tent and pack it up. When the caravan moved off at dawn, Cicely was hidden in the corner of a car and duly unpacked at the next halting-place. There the manager's wife took pity on her, and at the child's earnest entreaty suffered her to stay with the company.

Fearless, agile, and fond of animals, Cicely quickly learnt to mount or manage every creature in the circus, and was not afraid of the old lion himself: thus in a short time she became a useful and attractive addition to the company. For the first year or two she found the life amusing and pleasant, in spite of rough tumbles, rougher words, hard blows (to which she was accustomed) and harder work. But as she grew older and discovered the misfortunes incident to a singularly charming and unprotected girl, and heard the

conversation of some of the women in the company, she took a disgust to the circus. Then the kind Mrs. Morden, her only protector, died, and Cicely had the serious misfortune to attract the manager's son, a not unusual combination of tiger and swine, whose rancour at being rebuffed pursued her with calumnies even after she had stolen away from the company to escape him.

So there was 'the other Cissie, the poor Cissie,' set adrift in the wide world again, homeless, friendless, ignorant, without 'visible means of existence,' and liable to be sent to gaol according to the blessed and holy laws of our native land for these accumulated crimes. But when, after much privation and wandering from pillar to post, she was taken for charity into service, her mistress was ill-pleased to find in the half-developed beauty of sixteen a total ignorance of everything but circus-riding. A nasty fall, contrived by young Morden in a difficult leap through a high-held hoop, brought on some internal

trouble, and Cicely soon found herself in the workhouse hospital, whence she at last emerged in worse case than before, with the workhouse brand and a serious physical weakness. At this period she hid in haystacks and outhouses by night and would have remained there by day in the apathy of utter dejection till she died of hunger, had she not been obliged to creep out at sunrise. Then followed a see-saw between the infirmary and ill-paid drudgery in small houses, with haystack intervals, in one of which she followed some of the Lewises home to their gate and begged herself, thin, ragged, and without recommendations, into their service. There, under proper treatment, she gradually grew strong and learnt the finer household tasks, and was very happy.

Here Cicely's story stopped. Of her supposed marriage she said nothing. The rosary had been many times pawned and redeemed in the course of this chequered career; she clung to it as a sort of talisman, hoping one day to be identified

by it: it was the one romantic element in her child-life.

Cynthia was fairly convinced of the verity of this story, especially as it stopped short precisely where the mystery began. How to unravel that tangled skein perplexed her night and morning; but she could do next to nothing while Cecil, who had recovered consciousness, was speechless and helpless; his large eyes, which might at any moment close for ever, followed her every movement with dumb piteousness in which she knew that some strong desire was struggling for utterance.

One day, instead of the inarticulate sounds with which he kept vainly trying to express himself, the judge said clearly, 'My own child.' But nothing more. Those three words henceforth constituted the whole vocabulary of the man who had held at his command a diction so rich and ready.

When Lady Marlowe was at last able to leave her husband for several consecutive hours, she went to Woodleigh, whither

she had previously sent Bob Ryall to pick up information respecting Cicely's mysterious husband. There Bob had learnt much of the Lewises' household by apparently casual and aimless gossip over shop-counters, at public-house bars, with the milkman and the butcher. He had opened conversation with the gardener at Rosemount by lighting pipes with him, and surprised one of the maids on a rainy day with the offer of an umbrella, and, though Bob Ryall was the father of grown sons and his mop of yellow curls was thinning, he still preserved his social charm and fascination, so that he extracted all the information they possessed from these two. But he could gather little that he did not know before; that Cicely was too well conducted to excite gossip, was a companion rather than a servant to Captain Lewis, and had no followers. Further, that the Lewises, though living a very quiet life, frequently had young people of both sexes staying in the house. The existence of these male guests had come

to light during the trial, but had been dismissed as irrelevant; it had also come out at the same time that a young doctor and a young curate often at the house had both been interested in Cicely, who appeared to like their attentions. These gentlemen appeared in the witness-box, where they bore themselves in a manner which convinced the jury of their ignorance of the supposed husband. But Cynthia was certain that one of those gentlemen visitors could have solved the mystery of the absent husband.

When Lady Marlowe's fly stopped at a gate on the top-bar of which was inscribed the word 'Rosemount,' she alighted, pushed the heavy gate open, and walked up a winding gravel-drive overshadowed by trees. It was a bright spring forenoon; bees were abroad with a promise of summer in their drowsy hum; pink lime-branches, starred with emerald leaflets, traced a shining network on the pale-blue sky; flower-beds were gay with crocuses and hyacinths; blackbirds were fluting gaily;

there was a vague, delightful smell of blossom and fresh verdure in the air.

From an open window came the plaintive song of a violin with piano accompaniment. The mournful *adagio* movement soon merged in an *allegro con brio*; the joyous change of the music at her approach seemed a good omen.

The music ceased, and a man's mellow voice began Mozart's moving '*Io ti lascio, O cara, addio!*' It was too much. The rich yet severe beauty of the melody expressed in its restrained heart-break all that had been lying suppressed within her for so long, and she turned aside and wept beneath the shadow of the trees. The song poured on in melancholy magnificence to the violin's sympathetic lament, bees hummed, shadows moved with the sun's march, buds opened, and, with every unclosing leaf and every shortening shadow, the sands of Cicely's life were lessening.

When Lady Marlowe at last reached the hall-door, which stood open to the sunshine, the song had ceased, and the

singer — a young man with a blonde moustache and broad shoulders — was bounding down the stairs, still singing brokenly. He cleared the last few stairs with a bound, and had taken his hat from a stand, when he became aware of the lady on the threshold a few paces off.

‘Will you come in?’ he said, advancing. ‘I hope you have not been kept waiting.’

‘I had not yet rung. I——Captain Lewis lives here?’

‘Yes. I am Captain Lewis’s son. Both my father and mother are at home.’

‘I am Lady Marlowe,’ she said, studying his face from the shelter of her veil, while her heart beat quickly.

His face changed at the name, but only from a cheerful cordiality to a respectful gravity.

‘This is very kind!’ he said. ‘But won’t you sit down?’ handing her a chair in the nearest room, whither he had conducted her. ‘They have been much touched by the interest you have shown in the case of that poor girl, I can

assure you—my mother especially. Of course it has been a frightful upsetting for them—indeed, for all of us’—he turned to ring the bell—‘Cicely had become a member of the family; we all liked her. As for my wife’—this word gave Cynthia a faint shock of relief—‘she can’t get over it a bit.’

She reflected that this frank and cheerful young gentleman could not possibly hold the key she at first thought he might have been able to furnish. Then she saw Cecil standing unembarrassed on the ice at Cottesloe twenty years ago, and heard him tranquilly allude to ‘that unfortunate young woman!’ and ‘that poor girl!’ until she was half suffocated with pain.

‘Gross is der Männer Trug und List;
Mein Herz mit Schmerz gebrochen ist.’

Who knew but ‘my wife’ might unconsciously have sealed ‘that poor girl’s’ death-warrant?

‘I came to consult Captain and Mrs. Lewis,’ she continued, with a gaze that

did not lose the least variation in the young man's face, 'in the hope that we might come upon the track of evidence justifying a reprieve. The execution is fixed for this day week—there is no time to lose.'

'Awfully good of you!' he replied, unmoved beneath her steady and lustrous gaze. 'I am afraid it is a forlorn hope. I thought so from the first. But ladies are not easily daunted, not even by forlorn hopes.'

Then Cynthia remembered Cecil's calm face in the presence of his newly-dead wife, and his tranquil question, 'I wonder if this poor young woman had any friends?' But she was not in love with this young man, and she was no longer an ignorant girl, but a mature woman—wise with the bitter wisdom of life's experience, and acquainted with sorrow and wrong.

'Cicely must not die,' she said with emphasis, 'if by any sacrifice we can save her.'

He looked frankly surprised, and his

blue eyes said plainly, 'What can one make of such a saying as that?' He murmured some vague, civil assent, and then, a servant coming to show the guest into another room, the brief interview terminated.

Mrs. Lewis received her cordially. Lady Marlowe's kindness in taking up this sad case was beyond words. They were grieved by the judge's illness, which made it all the more kind of Lady Marlowe to concern herself with others. It was a blow from which they could never recover. Captain Lewis's affliction made him so dependent. Cicely read, and even recited, so well; her voice was so good—strong, yet musical. Had Lady Marlowe observed that she had no accent, and that her English was pure? She could read music, and wrote a fair hand. Then, those long walks, so necessary to the Captain's health never tired her, though no one else could accomplish them. His sons naturally could not devote so much time daily.

'You are singularly fortunate in keeping

your grown-up sons at home,' Lady Marlowe said. 'Families are usually scattered as they grow up.'

Mrs. Lewis was not so fortunate after all. One daughter had married and gone out to India; only one remained unmarried at home. Their eldest son was only passing a few months near them with his wife, after a three years' cruise.

'I beg your pardon—three years?' asked Cynthia, with some anxiety. 'And when did he return?'

'Only in August. And he is daily expecting another ship,' she lamented, whereupon Cynthia lost interest in this son. 'And our soldier son only pays us short visits,' Mrs. Lewis added.

'With his wife?' The question showed more eagerness than Cynthia intended.

'Not invariably. She is very reasonable, and likes us to have him all to ourselves occasionally.'

Cynthia again became interested, and kept the conversation upon the soldier son until she learnt that the marriage was

a singularly happy one of some years' duration.

Then Cicely's history was corroborated and amplified by fresh detail, and her decorous life beneath the Lewises' roof and in daily contact with them described. Also the horror and indignation, as well as surprise, caused by her arrest on so frightful a charge, their trust in her innocence and amazement at her duplicity, and the shock of her confession that she was secretly married and a mother, with their sorrowful and gradual conviction that she was, if not guilty of actual crime, probably a party to some dubious proceedings in the disposal of her child. 'I have thought,' Mrs. Lewis said in conclusion, 'that the father may have been the guilty person, without her consent, but with her knowledge.'

Cynthia shuddered. Was this poor lady accusing her own son? She thought of Cicely's firm mouth, and the defiant reticence which so suddenly succeeded her childish candour; she thought of the

sad up-bringing and perilous circumstances of her youth. Was she guilty, after all, and deceiving her by excellent acting? She saw Cicely throw herself dramatically at her feet in her cell, in the midst of her anger and horror, and burst into violent weeping. Was this not almost too good to be true? Poor Cicely!

She remained silent, looking out on the sunny lawn, whence the tranquil song of scythe and whetstone was heard. Then she remembered that the condemned prisoner was her husband's own child.

By this time the tree shadows had turned and were falling eastward; the span of Cicely's life was contracting as they lengthened.

'Mrs. Lewis,' she said at last, after hearing more of Cicely, 'I have not the smallest doubt that Cicely has been united in marriage, or otherwise, with some man whom she must have met in this house. Will you think of the unmarried men who have been here during the last two years?'

'There is not one whom I can suspect.

I have thought of them all again and again.'

'Do you know *who* Cicely is?' she asked, beginning to quiver.

'No. We have always thought that she came of good blood, and there are vague rumours of her parentage having been discovered in court.'

'It *was*. But we hope not to the world. She is—oh, Mrs. Lewis!—she is my husband's own child.'

Here she broke down, shaken by strong crying, and it was some time before she could finish her story.

'Her mother was a young French girl who nursed my husband through a dangerous illness,' she continued with her usual sweet calm. 'In a fit of gratitude he married her; but this was not generally known. She remained in France to be educated. She died in England, leaving this little girl, who was lost by her nurse. The rosary was a gift from the judge to his first wife.'

Mrs. Lewis was speechless. She rose

and turned to look out of the window, where the gardener's scythe hishing through the grass made her think of another mower before whose scythe the green moments of the doomed life were falling. Then she turned back, hoping that Cynthia's emotion might have passed, for the word *wife* had broken down her composure once more.

'Dear Lady Marlowe,' she said, 'what can I say in the face of such a tragedy? Silence seems the only possible sympathy.'

Cynthia, having missed her train in consequence of her discomposure, appeared at luncheon full of painfulest interest in this family, which now consisted only of the Lewises and their unmarried daughter Georgie. She exerted herself to draw out the characters of her hosts in the course of table-talk. Presently Mrs. Lewis addressed her husband as George: Cynthia's heart began to throb. 'And you gave your name to a daughter rather than to a son, Captain Lewis?' she asked.

‘To both impartially ; my wife likes the name.’

‘To the soldier or the sailor?’

‘To neither — to our youngest son. But he is called Valentine, his second name.’

Cynthia drank some water and paused to think.

‘We have only two sons,’ she resumed, ‘both as yet virtually at home. Our eldest is at Oxford.’

‘Our youngest is far beyond Oxford,’ Captain Lewis replied. ‘He must needs choose an unlucky profession, civil engineering, which is overstocked. He hasn’t got on, poor Val ; he is the family failure. He is gone to New Zealand now in hope of better luck.’

Cynthia scarcely knew what followed, save that she kept the conversation on the family failure and discovered that he had but just arrived at Dunedin, having sailed the first week in January. This date explained the comparative emptiness of the house at the time of

Cicely's last holiday, all the family having in turn either gone to fit Valentine out for the voyage or to see him off. Further, that he had spent the greater part of the last two years 'kicking his heels about London' and looking for employment, and that he now hoped to do something by lighting towns in New Zealand with electricity. Then the conversation fell upon music, especially Mozart's.

'Mrs. Lewis,' Cynthia said when they were alone in the drawing-room again, 'I must telegraph at once to your son at Dunedin.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Lewis, turning pale, 'not that; it cannot be that. We never for a moment suspected that. He was not often at Rosemount. And—you don't know my son, my poor, good Val!'

'He must certainly know what is to take place next week,' Cynthia replied, agitated but resolute. 'He can scarcely have heard from you yet. He may be able to help us, at any rate. No harm at least will be done by a cablegram.'

An hour later she left the house, taking with her a cablegram addressed to Valentine Lewis, in the care of a Dunedin acquaintance, to this effect: 'Cicely Rennie to be executed April 14, for child murder January 10. Evidence wanted for reprieve.'

CHAPTER XV.

FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

THE spring days went on lengthening with pitiless joy ; each new beauty they developed brought a young human creature in her springtide nearer the black gate of death. One swallow had flown from over sea, violets were in fullest bloom, blackthorn hedges studded with tiny white buds, cowslips beginning their vernal dance over chalk slopes ; the sun was going down in great glory on the last day but one of Cicely's life.

They told her of the cable to New Zealand. She heard in silence, flushed crimson, went deadly pale, flushed and paled again. From that day she was rest-

less and excitable, starting at sounds, and looking into the face of every new-comer with ever-disappointed expectancy. Lady Marlowe had a second interview with her, this time without privileged infraction of rule, but with barriers between them; her solicitor saw her once more; else she saw only prison officials, having declined the farewell visit the Lewises wished to pay her, and writing to them instead.

The day now so gloriously closing had been stormy and wet, very different from Cicely's life, which, as she saw it in retrospect, had been brief and stormy, lighted with one gleam of golden promise in its morning, and quickly clouding to an abrupt setting in storm and premature darkness. Her window caught the first slant ray of sunrise and the last of sunset, golden measures tracing the shortening span of her life on the blank white wall. She watched the quivering beam creep over the small space, crimsoning, as it passed, to a stormy red, and leaving a sudden cold grayness behind; to-morrow that glorious pencil would trace

the same characters on the same wall, and on the morrow's morrow, but she would not see the second set of sun ; her eyes would be quenched then, like those last rays. Once more, and yet once more, she might see the rosy flush of morning pass, turn to gold, and fade, and then—she put her hands to her slender white throat. She looked beyond to a world in which there is no more need of the sun ; yet she clung to this ; there was eternity in which to enjoy the next, but the few remaining minutes in this were flying beyond recall.

The earth-murmur, the sounds of familiar human life, shouts of playing children, rumble of passing wheels, whistling of boys, cries of street-hawkers, chiming of clocks, even the warder's step and the measured tread of the sentry pacing unseen below—sounds she would soon hear no more—were sweet. Now a bugle rang out, now a picket tramped by, a mounted orderly trotted jingling past ; but still, through all those harmless everyday sounds, came one that smote dully upon her heart, the

regular, continuous knock, knocking of hammers.

But what was that sweet preluding in the distance? Only a harp and some violins accompanying the worn tenor voice of a street-singer, whose song was borne fitfully to her prison :

‘My pretty Jane, my dearest Jane,
 Ah, never look so shy ;
 But meet me, meet me in the evening,
 When the bloom is on the rye.’

She had heard it sung in happier days by a younger, clearer voice ; the faint music, rising as a dim memory from the past, made her fall to sudden strong weeping, like Francesca da Rimini, when, in her misery, she recalled the first trembling kiss of the happy time.

‘The summer nights are coming, love,’

the musician continued, and the dull knocking marked time. Did *he*, in his distant new world, remember those summer nights and the rye-bloom ? The song was welcome ; it assured her of this poor earth

of ours, which, with all its limitations and imperfections, is still the only home yet known to us. 'But God will be in heaven too,' she thought.

She could see the lucid sky in its passing splendour, but the shadows deepened in her prison-chamber, drowning all but the wall opposite the narrow window in gloom. She clung to the iron bars and drew herself up by her hands, bracing her feet against the wall to see more of the fading world. Thence she could discern the top of a tree, its opening leaf-buds shining gem-like in the after-glow, and bright raindrops still trembling from the points of its branches; she could see below, a sea of roofs pierced by spire and tower. The streets were in shadow, but the towers reposed above in serene glory; the sculptured angels facing the four winds on St. Margaret's belfry were bright above the gloom, the westward angel bathed in rosy fire, the wings of the northward angel tipped with gold. What sights those calm angels had seen! When the eastward

angel had received the morning glory twice more and the great east window had twice become a living splendour, they would look upon——

‘Oh, name the day, the wedding-day,’

the tenor sang as if in mockery of the dreadful day so soon to dawn.

By this time all the town lights had appeared, dim yellow dots in the twilight. Now the flush left the zenith, the east darkened, a star looked out, Cicely’s cramped hands left their hold, her face, now bright in the lingering light, sank into the prison shadows and was lost. The song had ceased. The hard glare of gas came through the door of her cell.

A snatch of antique song was floating through her brain, ‘Say I died true.’ He would say that of her; their secret would die with her. But it was hard, hard. Had he ever loved her? Was it for honour’s sake that he left her to die a dishonoured death? In the happy days he delighted in the cavalier song :

‘I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more.’

She was dishonoured, the prison brand was upon her, there was nothing left her but to die.

There was no doubt that her husband knew of her peril ; the vessel had arrived. He must have received, not only the letters written immediately after his departure, but those sent by the next mail ; by this there was full time for a reply to have reached her, he could have telegraphed long since.

Whose was the little babe found in Weston Wood—was it thrown into the pool alive ? Why did he scatter her own child’s clothing—the hood and veil, so easy to identify—found in the bushes ? Their child was in safe hands, and need never know his mother’s disgrace, else——

Gay music came fitfully to her ears ; it was the band playing at the officers’ mess. Carriages rolled by ; people were going to evening entertainments : how

much happiness and enjoyment was given to some people, while others, like herself, were full of trouble from their very cradles ! How unreasonable to cling to a life so full of wrong and inequality ! But she did not wish to die.

Presently a waning moon looked through the iron bars and saw Cicely's face, calm and pale on her coarse pillow, her full crimson lips slightly smiling, her broad level brow shadowed by her dark hair, her breath quiet as an infant's. 'Mother,' she said in the long-forgotten dialect of her native village, moving gently and stretching out her arms lying on the draperies, 'mother !'

The moon looked on many wakeful eyes that night ; it beamed upon pleasant homes, and turned the scaffold in the prison-yard to gleaming silver ; it looked in through curtain chinks on the troubled, wakeful eyes of Cicely's speechless judge, and those of his tired wife watching by his side ; looked on the unknown sister, waking and thinking of 'the other Cissie,

the poor Cissie,' whose soul was to go forth so soon into the abyss no plummet has ever sounded; it looked upon the mass of buildings containing barracks, court-house and gaol in one, and lent them a pale, unearthly beauty; it pencilled the shapes of prison bars on cell floors as tenderly as it drew webs of budding branches on cool and dewy turf, or outlines of traceried windows and carven columns on cathedral pavements; it touched the sleeping streets, so unlovely by day, with mystic beauty, and spread broad pathways of shining splendour over the wide gray sea, silvering lonely ships as they glided with shimmering sails in the silence; it cast a calm glance upon the green, faintly-shining earth, wheeling so stilly on its appointed path, unconcerned by all that weight of wearied and vexed humanity on its mighty breast.

While the moon's mystic glory thus lay upon England, the full blaze of the sun fell on a newer England set in another sea, beneath other stars, and lighted the

noonday toils and pleasures of those sleeping Englishmen's kinsfolk there. It streamed from a sky of purest blue through crisp, exhilarating air, upon the palm-like foliage of gigantic ferns and unfamiliar weeds and grasses, upon an irregular coast, dented and fretted with many a winding creek, land-locked bay, and far-stretching headland reflected in deep blue sea; it shone upon rolling uplands, turfed and treeless, recalling English downs, though bare of homestead or village spire in their folds.

The full warm lustre of that mid-day sun fell upon two men riding over the crest of one of these lonely uplands, whence they caught here and there the sparkle of far-off sea. One man was ugly and dark, the other well-favoured and fair; the latter was what the ugly man called a new chum. The ugly man, whose ugliness was too emphatic and picturesque to be unpleasant, and whose square dark face was strong and genial, and lighted by two brilliant eyes differing

both in size and colour, was ruminating with an occasional glance at his fair-faced companion upon what the latter had told him of his prospects over a succession of pipes the night before, when the station ladies were sleeping the sleep of the day-labourer and the ugly man would fain have done the same.

Debts paid again and again by an indulgent father, from whom he derived his sole income—for the profession he had chosen did not pay—the chance job of lighting a New Zealand town by electricity bringing him from the other side of the earth in the hope of finding other such work in that scantily peopled colony—that was the whole story.

‘But, my good fellow,’ thought the ugly man, ‘why could you get nothing to do in all those years? You had indeed an office in town with your name and quality duly set forth, but it strikes me that you were not often to be found inside that office. More than half the week seems to have been spent in the

country, knocking about at your governor's house. How about those frequent foreign tours and home fishing excursions? Then, I remember me, when I was at home, that you turned up that fastidious nose of yours at more than one good offer that was far beyond the merits of a youngster like you. My young friend, I more than suspect that you have no genius for work and a pronounced talent for play. Hospitality is a virtue, but it would be kinder to bundle you straight off to Raratonga without more ado.'

While the ugly man thus mused, his companion, smitten by that wholesome malady, nostalgia, was repeating in a soft tenor warble, drowned by the thud of eight cantering hoofs,

'My pretty Jane, my dearest Jane,
Ah, never look so shy,'

and thinking rather dolefully that the summer nights now coming in merrie England would be winter ones on this side of the world.

They had ridden fast and far, having started early to look after some sheep, and making such wide sweeps round, and astonishing plunges straight across, a country with few roads in it, as took away the new chum's breath, and convinced him that more riding befell a sheep-farmer in one week here than a grass-country fox-hunter at home in three.

He was more glad than he would have cared to own when the ugly man drew rein at the edge of a shady wood and proposed a halt and luncheon, consisting of tea boiled then and there with sugar and milk in a tin over a fire of dry sticks and grass, a pipe of powerful tobacco, and some damper and meat.

The horses browsed comfortably, tethered in the shade ; the ugly man lay on his back with his long legs crossed and one pointing skywards, as if he could not reconcile himself entirely to antipodean ways of walking head downwards on an inverted earth ; the other lay on his chest and elbows, his head supported on his hands, and his face earth-

wards, as if he would look straight through the world to England, where his friends lay sleeping beneath the shining moon.

He was pondering on a mystic utterance in a home letter just received. 'Your father is lost without his companion, for Cicely has left us. Poor girl! you will scarcely believe what a false step she has taken—made a secret so-called marriage, the husband mythic. There was a child born before you left: such duplicity in one seemingly so straightforward!'—But where was Cicely? And why had she not written? She had at least kept faith with him by her silence.

'A pair of stout arms and the sense to use them is the chief thing in the colonies,' the dark man was saying. 'The next thing is a wife with the same. A little capital comes handy. People who want to sit still and admire their own virtues had best stay at home. Public works are no go. The thing has been overdone.'

'Marrying,' replied the younger, gloomily, 'is dust and ashes. One thinks

a woman a goddess and moves heaven and earth till one has got her, when she immediately turns into an everyday fellow-creature.'

'King Solomon, the many-wived, wasn't a patch upon you for knowing all about it, Val. Who wants to marry a goddess? The best wife is a fellow-creature of average badness to match one's own, an amiable everyday sinner, not too fine to stand by a man and put her shoulder to the wheel. But where is Miss Dora? Is your godmother's heart still set on that match?'

'My dear fellow, Dora wouldn't take me for double our godmother's money. Besides, I have made the most infernal mess of it. Privately married a—well, she was half companion, half maid, at Rosemount.'

'Oh—h—h!' drawled the ugly man. 'Well, you probably have the right sort of wife for the colonies, and worth all your godmother's money. What? left her behind and brought the child out? Now, what has your wife done to deserve that, Val?'

He had turned over, and was looking at the young man's downbent face.

'It seemed better to make a place for her first. Then, you see, my people will never accept that. To my father it will be the last straw.'

'You must make a clean breast, young one, and have your wife out here. It is a cruel and dangerous position for a young woman.'

'The whole thing is an infernal mess—wrong all through. Of course I ought not to have left her, and—hum—well, only idiots marry out of their own class. And I hadn't the passage-money.'

'Goddesses don't answer for wives. Egeria was only a nymph; besides, she took care not to live with him. Ulysses got tired of Calypso, and sat down and cried to go home to Penelope, and couldn't be comforted. I never knew but one goddess, my step-sister; she is the exception. She was a sort of living fairy-tale to us. As we grew up and got into scrapes we flew to her. Make the best of your

fellow-mortal, young one, and thank heaven she isn't a goddess.'

'Well, you see, that sort of blunder is fatal.'

'You must pay for blunders, my young friend. She was pretty, and you had nothing else to do; isn't that about the size of it? All you can do now is to stick to her and be thankful. Out here a family will be no drawback. Her virtues will shine out, and her defects be hidden, here. So you brought the boy away to save her from complications. What awful rot! Got Mrs. Browne to take him. Fatal blunder indeed!—humbug and selfish cant! According to you she's a good girl and pretty—fond of you, too. Hasn't found out you're not a god yet, eh? Yet you must needs leave her and go whining about the world because she isn't a goddess. I didn't tund you enough at Winchester; though I confess I never thrashed any fag more.'

'Of course I mean to have her out here if I can make a place for her,' the fair-

faced man replied. And then they mounted and rode back to the station.

The new chum felt as if he had somebody else's legs on instead of his own when he tumbled off his tired horse in the slanting afternoon sunbeams, and staggered tipsily on to the veranda, where his hostess met him with a letter marked 'Immediate,' and bearing many post-marks and erased addresses. It was from his Dunedin friend, who, instead of telegraphing to an uncertain address, had forwarded the two English telegrams to his first *poste restante* address, whence it had followed him from place to place at a discreet distance.

He read it quickly, caught at the veranda pillar, and laughed aloud.

'Oh, Mr. Lewis!' cried Mrs. Cusacke, 'Mr. Lewis!'

'How far to the next telegraph station?' he asked in a thin voice.

'Not more than five-and-twenty-miles,' she replied in a reassuring tone, 'certainly not more.'

CHAPTER XVI.

A RACE WITH THE SUN.

‘AND not a horse fit to go,’ said Mark Cusacke, ‘and the next station ten miles the other side of the telegraph office!’

‘Do you understand, Cusacke?’ cried Lewis. ‘It is my wife—my wife, I say! And this evening is to-morrow morning at home. It—O God!—it is always done in the morning. And it is my infernal fault. I must ride something, if I ride it to death. A horse, I say! Get me a horse! When the beast founders, I must run for it.’

‘He is a light weight; Norma might carry him, Mark; she is the fittest we have to-day,’ panted Mrs. Cusacke, almost crying at the thought of ruining her pet.

‘Right, Kate. Feed the man, and pack a flask of spirits for him, and I’ll get Norma ready. And, Mabel, you prick him the road on the rough chart we made, and be quick, child!’

In ten minutes Lewis was in the saddle again, pausing impatiently in the slant autumn sunbeams on the tired chestnut mare, which had been hastily fed and rubbed down and given a bottle of champagne, to hear the last instructions as to his way, while Mrs. Cusacke patted the mare’s shining neck and gulped down a great sob at a parting she foresaw would be final.

‘Hold her in for the first mile, Mr. Lewis, and then give her her head and don’t spur,’ she cried after him as the mare sprang forward at the first touch of the whip, and horse and rider disappeared beneath the station trees.

‘Lewis can ride, Kate; he’ll spare her strength all he can, you may be sure. Five o’clock is it? He’ll do it; he’s the lightest weight here, except you girls;

and even if you could have done the ride, you couldn't have managed his telegram, you see. The Lord only knows what he wants to say, and there's life or death in the saying of it. Dying to know all about it? — I dare say. Just think! Cynthia sent the message.'

Lewis, of late years unaccustomed to riding, thought there was no more go in him before he got that telegram, which shot through him, like the very lightning that brought it across the world, and turned his stiff and tired body to a mingling of fire and air. The news was so sudden and startling he could not at once grasp it; one sole idea possessed him—that he must stop the impending horror. Not until he began to ride had he the least notion of what he could do to hinder it. To telegraph came by instinct rather than thought.

But when Norma settled into her swift, easy stride and the station fences began swimming past, things grew clearer to him. Child - murder on January 10 explained itself. The baby's disappearance had evi-

dently caused suspicion to fall in some unexpected way upon Cicely, who had been unable to account satisfactorily for her dealings with the infant she must have been seen carrying on the public highway. The poor girl must have been loyal to her word—foolishly but splendidly loyal; tears scalded his eyes at the thought. She was actually about to die for her word's sake. She must have been in custody many weeks before her trial, and thus unable to communicate with him without breaking faith. His people knew nothing; that was clear from their letter written six weeks since. But why had they not told him the tragic truth? There was a visible effort at cheerfulness in the letter; they wished not to depress him. His father had lived a different life—trebled in interest—with Cicely for a companion; they hoped to keep her during his life; they were all attached to Cicely; there was a vague notion afloat in the family to the effect that she must and would never marry.

Had Cicely waited for his voluntary evidence, hoping and trusting in him, assured that he was aware of her peril? Only this was certain—she was about to die, and had kept faith. In her innocence she had doubtless expected an acquittal, and had delayed sending to him till the hour of her utmost need. That was a week ago.

On, Norma, on! you go like a bird; the champagne has roused your reserve strength; you look as if airily but firmly fashioned of some fine blending of speed and fire; your beautiful eyes glow as if with the proud consciousness that you carry a life's salvation; you pick up your swift feet daintily where a less splendid goer would stumble; but there is foam on your flanks, your nostril is crimson, and how will you stay at this pace?

Lewis looked at the sinking sun, and the sweat sprang on his brow; when the sun set on these downs it would rise upon England, and when the sky took on the last flush of evening here, it would pale

with the first glimmer of dawn at home. And the telegram must reach its destination before the next sun set in England and rose here. On, Norma, on !

The sweet creature increased her speed beneath the caressing pressure of the hot, eager hand on her neck ; she was like an embodiment of winged desire ; the magnetic hand thrilled her with the rider's passion ; she was at one with him. Her mistress said truly she was too willing and sensitive to need the spur. After that first touch not even the whip was used, except to be drawn gently over her shining shoulders. At each sound of the voice she increased her speed, quivering to the suppressed passion of his voice. She scarcely needed even that light stimulus, but answered to his very thoughts ; and in the height of the turmoil of thought and emotion he loved and keenly desired to possess this noble creature.

Here is a deep broad stream : the ground is firm on this side, but what of the other ? Norma rises lightly, now she

is off the ground, now her hind-feet have touched firm earth again ; the stream is gurgling on its way behind them ; the ground rises steadily before them ; she faces it nobly, but with evident distress ; foam-flakes bespatter her rider ; can she stay ?

The chill of evening was coming on ; Lewis felt the sharpness to his hot face : it was the chill of approaching dawn at home, where Cicely was still lying peacefully asleep on her pillow in the darkness, the moon having passed by her window. The hilltop is reached, and Norma goes more easily and with unslackened speed. If she can but stay !

He saw Cicely's character more clearly as he rode on. It was strong, loyal, and proud ; she could not break her word. It was that fine scorn and proud aloofness, so singular in a girl so lowly placed, which had given her beauty its greatest enhancement in the first kindling of his admiration, and which, coupled with her gentleness and generous devotion to his blind father, had won his

love ; the knowledge that she was not to be lightly approached, much less won, was the spur to a passion that otherwise might have flagged, and even ceased. She was far too proud not to die rather than drag him down by her own unmerited disgrace ; too loyal to break her word. Yes, he had truly loved her ; but a man rarely dares everything for a woman's sake ; he could not bear to see his wife serving in his father's house, or remember her low and dubious origin and antecedents. So the flame of his love flickered and died down into a dull discontent and resentful regret that he had taken little pains to conceal. ' I was a cur,' he thought—' a mean cur !' He thought of Cicely's promise at parting in Weston Wood, not to reveal their relationship till he gave her leave. This parting had stirred the smouldering fire of tenderness, and her face and voice and last look at the child followed him across the world with his half of the broken chaplet.

Fly, Norma, fly ! you are racing with no mortal steeds, but with the fire-maned

coursers of the sun ; desire wings you, hope speeds you, despair dogs you : not only dear life, but honour, which is dearer, depends upon your speed.

The space between the purple horizon and that blaze of golden splendour grows smaller and ever smaller, yet there is no trace of the wished-for goal among those valley-folds. Yonder is a shepherd's hut far off on an upland slope, out of the way, traced on the map ; no other dwelling is in sight, the land spreads lonely and desolate, without sign of man, to the horizon.

Now dark misgiving seized him, for this hanging wood to the right had not been named in his instructions. And where were those land-marks he was to have seen half-way ? Compass and chart were consulted, the reins lying on Norma's neck as the spirited creature kept on at a splendid pace. Yes ; it was too true, they were going wrong ; the sun had deceived him ; he had forgotten that it would be some degrees past the equator by this time, and

so had borne too much to the north. He changed his course a point to the south, and rode on, now much impeded by scrub, and harassed by doubts of the way, until at last, to his joy, he saw the majestic cabbage-tree standing alone on a rocky knoll, a landmark for some distance round, and knew by this that he was near the track again.

But what is this? Norma refusing, swerving, backing? She is no new chum, she is wiser than her rider; now she suddenly darts forward, plunges her white forefoot over the fetlock in a black quag, and backs again; the only thing is to trust her to find firm ground. That lily-white foot is the sign of want of staying power; she is beginning to show symptoms of distress. Now at last, after a long, vexatious circuit, they strike the track again, and a dim blue something in a valley is without doubt smoke curling above the desired goal.

New life sped through his stiffened limbs, he cheered the mare on with a good deep

hurrah : she gave a desperate plunge, recovered herself splendidly, but began to limp on that same stained off forefoot ; she had picked up a stone. In a minute he was off and kneeling with the hoof turned up in his hand, the mare panting and quivering, her delicate ears pricked in every direction while he opened his good six-bladed knife and rasped at the stone, which was wedged so firmly between the frog and the inner edges of the shoe that he thought the iron would move before the stone. His arm trembled, his breath came thick, the mare's leg quivered in his hand, hot blasts from her crimson nostrils poured on his face, he cast quick anxious looks at the sinking sun, he swore a fierce oath, he prayed, but that accursed stone would not move. At last, with a great jerk, it gave, throwing him off his balance and bringing him under the mare's fore-feet, while the rasp scored up his wrist and skinned it. Then he was up and on again, with the goal in sight, and the precious sunlight still playing on his fair hair and on Norma's bright mane.

Alas! the limp was permanent; that infernal pointed flint had gone to the quick of the foot, the mare's easy motion was spoilt, the pain was telling on her; yet she answered to his touch and went gallantly on. But the immortal coursers would soon outstrip her; the sun was now a crimson ball just above the earth's rim; the mare's distress increased with every stride; it was all he could do to hold her up. Presently there was a terrific crash, a confusion of hoofs and mane, and man and horse rolled together on the rough corduroy road. Then the red ball of flame slipped beneath the world's hazy rim, leaving a blaze of confused splendour behind.

'Oh, Mark!' Norma's mistress was just saying to her husband on the station veranda, 'would it be wrong to *pray* for Norma?'

Lewis, wiping the blood from his face and staggering to his stiff feet, which were encumbered with riding-boots, looked at poor Norma's convulsed limbs stretching and stiffening along the road in the pink

light with a ghastly smile. Heine was right: the ruler of human destinies is a keen humorist. For Lewis had been at great pains to put the whole bulk of the habitable globe between himself and his wedded wife, and now he would have given his life to be within reach of her. Love and desire are strong, but they cannot displace the mass of the solid earth or stir the smallest planet one degree from its strict course.

The sunken sun was by this time shining on the other side of the earth; the celestial fingers traced their gold and crimson characters once more upon the blank wall of Cicely's prison chamber; her dark eyes once more unclosed to see them; once more in the sweet rush of returning consciousness she welcomed the quivering lustre with joy, and once more her heart darkened in gradual assurance of grim reality. Then the condemned prisoner rose and began the devotions of that long, dim, dreamlike Sabbath, apparently so endless, and yet

ending with such dread quickness, and when the golden characters of evening marked the wall, she felt as if she had died long ago and was almost forgotten.

One more night of sweet, deep slumber, and Cicely rose refreshed to make her last toilet with exceeding care, remembering how she had braided and bound her splendid hair on her wedding morning.

Again she had dreamed of her young mother, and waking thought of her father. She could not overcome the strange repulsion she felt for this man ; but she pitied him, and sent him dutiful and kindly messages. And now in the deep emotions kindled by approaching death she thought that her mother must have loved him even as she loved her Valentine.

After she had duly received the sacrament, she asked the chaplain to tell the judge that he was affectionately remembered in her last thoughts and prayers. 'And to anyone who may make inquiries concerning me,' she added, 'will you say that I died at peace, think-

ing kindly of all who had ever been dear to me?' for she dared send her husband no clearer message. A strange fate was hers, owned by neither father nor husband, and bearing the name of neither.

And now all preparations were completed, the awful moment had arrived; Cicely's door opened for the last time, and she left her prison. Her face was no paler than usual, her step was firm and her eye clear; she took comfort in hearing the solemn words of the Burial Office, so unfamiliar to the young, repeated by the chaplain on that last short journey. It was very strange to her that she, young, healthy, throbbing in every vein with exuberant life, could be the subject of all that mournful measured pomp and stately rhythm of sorrow, chosen from the ages' treasury of nobly-worded lament for the travail of man, and full of august consolation and hope for the sons of men, which is the English Burial Office; more than strange, that the knell tolling so heavily

as she walked from the prison into the high-walled yard could be for her.

Newly-arrived swallows swept down into the yard in the sunlight, their graceful purple wings shining fresh from overseas, their swift and arrowy flight speaking of liberty and the keen joy of living. The pale sky, flooded with light of morning and spring, the single linden-tree with its ruddy branches flashing out into translucent green, the sea of smoke-hazed roofs just visible from the scaffold, and the far faint lines of bluish-green on the slopes beyond the city, which were open fields and woods, where larks and thrushes and the whole spring choir were singing and wild-flowers unclosing—all spoke vividly of the sweetness of life.

The knell tolled heavily on, but through it came the homely sounds of returning life from the half-awakened town. Shouts of merry boys, rumble of wheels, thunder of passing trains, church-bells calling to prayer, distracted her thoughts from the solemn words spoken in her ear. Yet this

bright sunshiny earth would in another minute slip from beneath her feet and be gone for ever.

The stern-faced officials stood erect and stiff, each in his place to see her die ; there was no escape for her ; strong men everywhere surrounded her ; the mysterious man, busy with the machinery which in another moment would hurl her spirit for ever from the trembling body, stood near ; the prison building and the high wall hemmed her in. It was hard, hard.

But what makes her tremble so strongly ? Only an infant's feeble, wilful wail borne from the distance ; so her own baby wailed the day it left her arms for the hireling woman's. Who would care for her pretty boy ? Would he grow up like his mother, desolate and unloved ? The chaplain's voice grew tremulous ; the clock was slowly booming out its eight strokes, rousing all the clocks in the town to follow suit ; a bugle rang out from the barracks ; she had already been pinioned,

and the mysterious man who stood behind her was placing something lightly, deftly, and with exceeding care round her neck ; she felt the heat of his strong hands and perceived the fresh odour of new hemp, and with one last silent prayer she expected her swift-coming death, having ‘borne it out even to the edge of doom.’

But then a sudden cry arose : ‘Not that ! no, no, not that ! Don’t let me die in the dark ! I will be still ! I will indeed !’

Then the stern faces of the officials changed ; the governor passed his hand across his face ; the doctor bit his lip ; a reporter felt deadly sick ; the chaplain murmured something in the prisoner’s ear. Cicely thought of the darkness on Calvary ; the ghastly thing fell over her face, blotting out the world ; yet one more pang in the darkness, and then——

She was but dimly conscious of a sudden stir and movement about her ; there was a confusion of men’s excited voices ; a dreadful qualm came over her. The governor’s

sharp, short word of command rang out ; the thunder as of many leagues of broken surf was in her ears ; everything spun wildly round and—vanished.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST MORNING.

THE same sweet April sunbeams shining on the scaffold were stealing through the windows of the judge's lodgings ; outside in the sunny ivy sparrows rollicked and chattered, quarrelled and fluttered, round their nests ; the odour of fresh wood-violets filled the room and some orchids were within sight of the bed on which Cecil Marlowe lay, speechless and helpless, all his life concentrated in the burning depths of his dark, unspeakably sad eyes. Cynthia had learned to interpret the perpetual dumb anguish of those restless, ever-asking eyes, but there were times when their baffled, helpless gaze, in

which lay the shadow of some incommunicable dread, was too sad to bear.

Like Valentine Lewis on the other side of the earth, this stricken man was realizing the grim humour of the ruler of human destiny. The irony of Cecil Marlowe's position was perfect. He had allowed his unloved child to drift helpless away upon the desolate waters of this wild world from pure carelessness and lack of interest in her; now he had to lie still and see the sands of her life running out with no power to help her by so much as a word; he would not own her in her infancy, he could not now that he would; he had grudged her the life she derived from him, it was his terrible doom to condemn her to a death he would have died to avert; he had been ashamed of the innocent child, she had grown up to be a shame to him and to the children of his love; the voice with which he had publicly denied her mother and herself was doomed against his will to publicly pronounce her death-sentence; the gift of fit and noble

speech, which had been his glory, he had been forced to use in judgment upon his child, and when he might have used it in her behalf, it was taken from him ; the arm which should have sheltered her infancy was, in the prime of his age, more powerless than an infant's. Cicely had been cast out from the light of his hearth-fire ; he was dying under a stranger's roof. But the crowning irony, the very cream of this terrific jest, was that he had sinned for Cynthia's sake, and it was upon her sinless head that the chief trouble fell.

One day when a book lay open by his side, showing the words ' God is just,' he took a pencil in his lips, pointed to the sentence, and looked at Cynthia.

“ “ And merciful,” ” she added, “ “ and slow to anger, and repenteth him of the evil.” ”

He smiled and looked in her face with a heart-breaking wistfulness, as if full of thoughts he would fain have expressed. ‘ My own child,’ he said in his faint, strained voice, ‘ my own child.’

The heroic wife was by his side to help and sustain him in this hour of despair, the averting of which they had awaited in sickening suspense since the despatch of the first unanswered message to New Zealand. One more faint ray of hope had been kindled by a second and more fully and distinctly worded cablegram, of which Cecil had approved by the dumb speech of his eyes ; but the days wore away, there was no reply and no order from the Home Office, and a more complete despair settled upon them.

Cynthia, pale with the sad thoughts of a sleepless night, but paler from those unspoken but divined in Cecil's wakeful eyes, sat at the window of the closed room, whence the bulk of the prison and the hoisting of the flag of death would be visible, waiting for the hour to strike, reading aloud the prayers for the dying, while Cecil's restless eyes travelled from the face of a clock to the window and back again. At last the musical prelude to the stricken hour began, and mortal

agony darkened the judge's face ; Cynthia rose from her place by the window and knelt by the bed, with his helpless hand in hers and her face buried, so that neither might see the other's anguish. Both knew every probable detail of the ghastly scene ; the actual thing could scarcely have been more dreadful than the imagined.

The soft, slow preluding ceased, and the deep boom of the hour-bell struck heavily upon their ears. At the first stroke Cecil strove inarticulately to speak, but lapsed into the usual cry, ' My own child ' ; at the second Cynthia began to tremble and the judge moaned ; at the third the relief of tears came to her, but his eyes closed their burning lids. Heavily fell the eight strokes with slow and measured boom, like the drums in the Dead March ; an eternity seemed to elapse before the eighth and last vibrated through their hearts. It was still humming upon the sunny air, when Cynthia lifted her head, thinking the worst must be over, and saw her husband's face white and unconscious on the pillow.

But the spirit was not gone ; the wide, dark eyes once more opened upon her ; there was even less suffering now in their mute questioning, as if the worst were past. As she bent over him, raising and supporting his head with one hand and holding a glass to his lips with the other, her senses were keenly alive to everything, to the merry riot of sparrows in the ivy, the melancholy chant of a watercress girl, the sharp rat-tat and quick step of the postman, trivial sounds and impertinent, because of the tragedy just enacted behind the prison wall.

The child practising scales on the other side of the dull street was more torturing this morning ; she was maddened by the certainty that a slow rumble of wheels must be the watering-cart, that a dull repeated thud was a maid banging door-mats against a wall. And through all this medley of aggressive stagnation and silence made audible, she heard the pavement smitten by the sharp, quick steps of a man running at full speed : now the sounds were dulled

on the gravelly road, and now they rang sharp again on the pavement; now they were on the doorsteps beneath that second-floor window, an impatient rattle of the handle opened the door, the footsteps stopped in the hall, where the sound of a man's voice was answered by the sharp treble cry of a woman's. Then the two voices mingled in quick succession of question and answer, a girl's light step flew up the two flights of stairs, followed more slowly by the man's the sick-room door burst open, and Cissie, panting, radiant, with tears raining unregarded over her face, rushed in like a spring tempest, waving a pink paper in her hand.

'Oh, father!' she cried, 'oh, mother! Reprieved! Reprieved!'

Cynthia let the helpless head slide back to the pillow, and sank into a chair, Cecil's eyes flashed a deeper fire from their sunken orbits and his lips moved quickly.

'My own child,' he said in the strange faint voice now so sadly familiar to them.

'Just in time,' cried Cissie. 'The clock

had struck ; the last prayers were said. The New Zealand telegram went to the Secretary's private address. He telegraphed last night, but the message was not delivered till this morning.'

The clock marked eight minutes past eight—eight pregnant minutes. Cynthia heard Mr. Luscombe pacing up and down the landing, and the judge having assented by a sign to her question, she bid him come in and tell his story--that he had returned to Alcaster on Sunday ; that he had waited by permission of the governor in the latter's house to hear, though he might not see, what befell in the last act of the tragedy and report to the judge ; and that he had been so eager to bear the good tidings without delay, that he knew nothing of the prisoner except that she had fainted.

While he was speaking, his face devoured by the piteous eagerness of the judge's questioning eyes, Cynthia was still aware of all the sounds, twittering sparrows, ticking clock, her own heart-beats, and, among those passing, the light,

irregular footsteps of a boy. She heard this boy stop and exchange shrill vituperation with another, and then run away jeering; she heard him move on, probably backwards. Now she could see him through the window; turning again, he shouted more vituperation at his distant foe, holding his hand to his mouth to make the sound carry, and, deftly dodging a stone, executed a war-dance with defiant clattering. Cynthia was compelled by malign infirmity of strained nerves to watch him, as with a final whoop of derision, he stopped, and, as if by an after-thought, delivered a pale-brown letter at the door.

It was from Rosemount.

‘V. L. sails home in *Ruapekaori* with son. Lady M. right. Evidence saving.’

‘With his son!’ echoed Cynthia, ‘and she had nearly died!’

‘My own child!’ faltered Cecil, tears streaming over the face he was too helpless to cover.

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When Cicely grasped the fact that she had been reprieved, the joy of life snatched from the abyss of death completely overcame her. The solid walls of that dreary cell were welcome in their prosaic bareness; the sight of her pulse visibly throbbing in her wrist, the soft and even rhythm of her breath, the warmth of her interclasped hands, all was delightful. To see the little square of lavender sky, barred though it was, and the pigeons flying across its lucid space, was rapture; the commonplace street noises and the brisk, inspiriting music of the band marching by to the beat of soldiers' feet made her cry for very joy. She tried to utter some thanksgiving, but could only fall on her knees and sob.

But when she heard later that she had been saved by a New Zealand telegram, her gladness deepened to solemnity, 'I knew it!' she exclaimed, in the first breathless awe of her joy—'I knew that he would not leave me to die!'

And he was coming home in the

Ruapekaori, which fine vessel might arrive in six weeks. Of course, she had never doubted it : he had seemed weary of her in those trying times, and she had been silly and exacting, not making allowance for his position, and the great sacrifice he had made ; but he was true at the core and responded to the first cry for help. Certainly she had never doubted him ; she had been sure all along that there was some mistake. And now he had given up his family and friends, his prospects and expectations, and was coming home to ruin and disgrace, to save her and claim an outcast wife from the foot of the gallows.

No one had ever been proud of Cicely : she had stumbled up to womanhood a tolerated creature at best ; it was a wonder to her that anyone should incur the slightest inconvenience for her sake, and here was this splendid prince plunging through the magic fence of flame to deliver her from malign enchantment. There was no such person as Cicely Rennie, the con-

demned convict ; Cicely Lewis, born Cicely Marlowe, might live happy and honoured for the term of her natural life. Her son might read of that trial in some old paper and never dream who Cicely Rennie might be.

The news of the reprieve was most unwelcome to Mr. Forde-Cusacke. This injured gentleman had by this time risen from horizontal woe to perpendicular resignation, or as one of his sons observed, ‘Thank goodness, the governor is on his hind-legs again.’ Mr. Forde-Cusacke had a certain robust faith in the remedial virtues of the herb pantagruelion ; he had too much common-sense underlying his whimsies to side with the heretical sect which holds that the worst use to which you can put a man is to hang him. For, in those rare intervals when his mental vision was not concentrated on his noble and interesting self, he had taken note of the stuff turned out of the polishing mills of nineteenth-century civilization, and rightly decided that the very best, if not the

only, use to which a certain residuum of human beings can be put is to hang them. This worthy man is not to be blamed if, in common with a jury of his fellow-citizens, he held Cicely Rennie to belong to this disastrous residuum. But the fact of her belonging also to his step-daughter's husband led him to conceive the herb pantagruelion to be especially wholesome for her. The dead are at least done with ; but a relative convicted of murder or manslaughter is a living and perennial disgrace.

He did not think so badly of the Marlowes as to suppose they would acknowledge the connection ; but, at the same time, it would exist, and might at any moment be raked up. He groaned to think of those floating rumours concerning Cynthia's husband, and the dreadful notoriety of the trial which had ended so tragically for the judge. And then those pestilent conjectures in the daily press, the many-tongued—what a thing it was to find these on one's breakfast-table, or to

see them gloated over by one's especial cronies at clubs!

‘There is no reasonable doubt,’ that Jovian organ, the *Period*, said later, concerning the reprieve and its occasion, important evidence from the Antipodes, ‘that the tragic event which recently cost the Bench one of its most humane and enlightened, as well as able and learned, ornaments, was due to the fact that Mr. Justice Marlowe, known to be constitutionally averse to the duty of passing capital sentence, found himself compelled by the exigencies of our present legal system to condemn a person whom he knew to be innocent, merely because twelve British citizens of ordinary mental capacity, and as absolutely untrained in the laws of evidence as they are little versed in the study of human nature, considered her guilty. Sir Cecil Marlowe has ably and eloquently written of the ineptitude of the average juror; he has fully exposed the absurd anachronism of retaining a judicial system framed for a rude people ac-

customed to trial by combat and ordeal in these days of full-blown nineteenth-century civilization. But so sublime is the divinity which doth hedge about a juryman, that his verdict, however unjust it may convincingly be proved to be, is irreversible ; not all the prerogative of the daily press, the Executive, and the Crown, not all the power of fully-proven innocence, can reverse the dread judgment of the holy twelve. The only course to be taken with an unjustly convicted prisoner, provided he have not suffered the extreme penalty of the law, is to grant him a free pardon—redress there can be none.'

'The popular imagination, easily inflamed by so striking an occurrence as the paralysis of a judge in the act of passing sentence, has set afloat most absurd conjectures as to the cause of Mr. Justice Marlowe's overwhelmingly painful emotion—conjectures which, we regret to say, the daily press has not hesitated to give utterance to, and which we believe to be totally without foundation. To be compelled to

condemn an innocent and helpless young woman to death is surely enough to upset the nerves of any man of average humanity and integrity, without the further aggravation of close kinship between judge and prisoner,' etc., said the *Mars*.

'The case of Cicely Rennie,' said the *Planet*, 'may well set us to ponder the value of circumstantial evidence. How much longer, we may well ask, are our courts of justice to witness the cruel absurdity of silencing the one person in possession of the facts of the case?'

Leaders in this style were sufficiently afflicting to Mr. Forde-Cusacke; but the furious correspondence that ensued on questions of criminal procedure arising from this case were still worse; in his anguish at being unable to look at a paper without some reference to the case for weeks, he again betook himself to horizontal woe—a woe accentuated by the fact that his own son, Mark, was in some way mixed up with this horrid affair—and could not regain perpendicular resignation for nine

days, when he was with difficulty induced graciously to pardon the human race.

Cicely's child, with the peculiarity of which she had spoken, and which Mrs. Dickson—its caretaker—had strenuously denied, was actually produced, and all the suspicious circumstances accompanying its disappearance were satisfactorily accounted for, both by its father and the woman into whose charge it was given on that January afternoon, and who had taken it to New Zealand—thus working out her passage thither.

So it came to pass one day, when June roses were blooming and ivy-leaves outside the judge's lodgings thickly coated with summer dust, that his first-born child, on being released from captivity, saw him face to face once more.

As the hour for her visit drew nearer, he became restless and excited, and kept trying to say something; all his efforts resulted only in the repetition of the one phrase—'My own child!'—in varying tones

of inquiry, remonstrance, entreaty, tenderness, despair, and resignation.

When Cicely, pale from long confinement and suffering, but bright, erect, and happy, stood before her father, and looked, with her accustomed fearless candour, straight into his burning eyes, the old feeling of repulsion thrilled each, but each strove against it, and saw it gradually die from the softening gaze of the other. The clock ticked but thrice before the eyes of both overflowed, the daughter's with pity for the dumb and suffering soul imprisoned in the eyes of the stricken man.

‘Father,’ she said, in the voice so strange yet so familiar to him, as she laid a bunch of fresh-blown roses by his faded cheek, ‘Father!’

‘My own child!’ he replied in his faint, far-off, strained voice.

When Cynthia came in later, Cicely was sitting, as she and Cissie were accustomed to sit, by the bedside. Cecil was gazing, gazing at his daughter in the wistful helplessness of his silenced heart, yet with a

happier look on his face than she had seen for long. For his warfare was at last accomplished.

During the remainder of the day he was quiet and happy, sleeping a little and waking refreshed, but something in his face warned Cynthia not to leave him. She sat by his pillow during the brief summer night, Bob Ryall, most tender and skilful of nurses, sleeping a dog's sleep as usual in the lobby. When the pale brief night of midsummer waned and the crimson dawn came stealing up the steep of the sky in deep silence, broken only by the quarter-hour chimes from a steeple, Cynthia rose, softly raised the window-blind, and looked eastward, whence all good comes, drinking deeply of the charm of approaching day, and bathed in the fresh glory of the changing light. While she stood thus, breathing the cool air, there fell on her ear a voice from the happy days of love and youth, a deep, resonant voice, strong with the full strength of manhood, yet mellow and sweet.

‘*Cynthia!*’ it called with the meaning and master-passion of a life in one word.

She turned quickly: ‘Cecil, *my* Cecil!’ she replied, in the voice of the young bride on the moonlit terrace, and in a moment she was by the face on the pillow, which was just flushed with the rose of dawn.

Years, sickness, the burden of life, heavy remorse for wrong-doing and neglected duty, bitter sorrow for its bitter fruit—all had rolled away like a morning mist from her husband’s face; he smiled upon her now as in his golden prime. Not the judge, but the young Cecil, full of hope and the ardour of poetic passion, looked out of the brilliant eyes which had lately been so full of cruel pain; and not the mother of grown children, but the young Cynthia, quivering with a bride’s half-conscious passion, met his ardent gaze.

The room was now full of the rosy glow, the charmed stillness was broken by the chirp and twitter of innumerable waking birds, as in the autumn dawn

when Cecil unburdened his heart to his wife and was forgiven. But when the rose-light changed to purple and gold, the eyes looking so deeply into Cynthia's darkened and fixed, as if their light had passed into hers. She closed them softly, and sank face downwards beside him in the first sharp anguish of widowhood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MUFFLED MUSIC.

ONE blue June day a rank of mowers stood outlined against the summer sky on an upland facing Cottesloe Grange, strong, brown men, their bare sinewy arms and chests shining with their toil, their faces shaded by broad hats picturesquely bent about. Each man had reduced his clothing to a minimum of belted trousers and wide-opened shirt, each held his scythe at the same angle at the same moment, each bent to the same grand, free sweep of the shining blade in finely balanced, rhythmic motion; a thin, small shadow lay at each erect man's feet, and each bending man cast thin, wavy lines of shadow across the

grass with the scythe's sweep ; heated air shimmered above the gray-green field ; the blades flashed with keen white light as they turned ; a lark, shooting up the sky, as if upborne on a circling storm of silver-sweet song, the hish of falling swathes, and light sharp crackle of grass-halm on scythe-edge, were the only sounds.

The rank of mowers diminished in height as they sank behind the grassy ridge ; now the gleam of steel was lost, now only the bronzed faces and arms with a flutter of striped shirt and a quaint crush of hat were traced against the pure blue, whence the shower of song poured incessant, till the lark, in sudden dead silence, dropped like a stone.

Then arose a beautiful melancholy music from the belfry of Cottesloe Church, slow, soft, inexpressibly mournful, rising in melodious wails, sinking in sorrowful murmurs, laden always with the burden of an unspeakable regret, with something of the hollow boom that lends such solemnity to the long, reverberating roll of distant

breakers, and yet with a most human cry of heart-piercing pain.

The scythe was arrested in its poise above the thick standing grass, dotted with rich red clover-heads ; a whetstone sang its pleasant song along a steel blade, blither sound than which there is none but the singing of larks.

‘ Whatever be come to Cottesloe bells ? ’ asked the lad with the whetstone, pausing while another man began upon his scythe. ‘ Sounds as though they was alost down underground somewhere or ’nother.’

‘ Last time they done that ’twas fur wold General Marlowe. ’Tes what they doos when r’yalty dies—covers up clapper a one side. Sims like as though the bells was a-cryen.’

‘ Hish, hish ! ’ went the scythes, timed now to the swirl of the muffled bells ; the cut swathes stood a moment tremulous, then sank wavering along the warm ground, with here a moon-daisy, and there a clover-ball, or sorrel-plume, standing above the felled stems.

‘ A hrich man med so well die as a poor un, so fur as I knows,’ growled Tim Barker, when the scythes were still again and the tired mowers had thrown themselves down in the cool grass under the oaks to take their noon-meat; ‘nobody can’t do no more than ate and drink so much as he can.’

‘ Sure enough, Tim. My wife’s vather, ’e drunk hisself to death. The Emperor of all the Rooshians could ’a’ done no more. A was a laäbourer same as me.’

‘ I ’lows you bain’t in no such girt hurry to go underground, Tim, and you be a poorish man,’ said another.

‘ I dunno as I be,’ returned Tim reflectively. ‘ Zims as though I’d so soon bide above ground now I be above it. Times is häerd zince they’ve a-took to this yer steäm. But there, I hreckon I’d so soon bide above ground. Chuck us that there bundle, wull ’ee?’

‘ Judge Marlowe, ee wasn’t not to say in years,’ said Will Niblett; ‘ a vine figure of a man, the youngest of the vam’ly.’

‘His sins hev a-vound en out,’ added Seth Dore, drawing a long breath and ruffling his gray hairs as he recovered an upright position after falling back gradually till he lay at full length with a wooden puncheon to his mouth. ‘Zome do say as this yer young ooman was his own child. When ee zeen that he got a stroke on the Bench. They carred en out o’ court fur dead.’

‘They’ve a-let she off,’ said Tim Barker. ‘The Queen, she give her a free pardon. I’ll warr’nt a poor man’s daughter would a-swung.’

‘Go on wi’ ye!’ growled Niblett, cutting a chunk of the bacon he held in his hand with his clasp-knife and stowing it in his cheek. ‘The Queen give her a free pardon ’cause she hadn’t a-done it.’

‘You talks zense, Bill Niblett,’ sneered Tim; ‘nobody can’t give a pardon to nobody when they hain’t a-done nothen, ye girt zote!’

‘She never dooded nothen, I tell ’ee,’ retorted Niblett. ‘Her maäster’s son,

ee'd a-made a honest ooman of 'er, and carr'd the child off to 'Merrika long with en and brought en back agen. So soon as they vound she never done nothen, they give 'er a vree pardon. That's the law o' the land.'

'Terr'ble wild ee was,' continued Seth Dore, 'and a was cut off in his zins for the warnun of mankind. I mind when that French ooman come after en—her that's buried down there by the belfry: 'twas a hard winter. Wold General, ee hushed it up. But there the poor ooman lies. There was a French captain come in the fall; a said 'twas his sister.'

'Some says 'twas his lawful wife,' said Niblett; 'my vather minds how she asked en the hroäd to Cottesloe. They turned her away in the starm a Christmas Eve. She bid outside in the snow till she was a-vroze to death. They vound 'er a Christmas Day. I helped dig her out o' drift.'

'Hrich men hev a deal to answer for,' said Tim Barker; 'this poor vrozen ooman

left a child, too. Nobody never known what come of that. '

'My uncle Ben made the cawfen day after Christmas Day,' said a young man with a curly yellow beard; 'I minds the snow that Christmas; 'twas drifted ten and twelve foot deep in plaäces; we couldn't get anighst the schoolhouse. Our gairden was deep snow to the upstairs windows.'

'Winter was some'at like winter then,' continued Seth Dore; 'nowadays there ain't nothen like it. Varmer 'Ood lost over varty ship in the drift that Christmas, let alone other volk. Times isn't what they was, what with mowen and hreäpen'-machines, and these here steam-ingins and school boords. Hreach me a light, Tim.'

'They Cottesloe bells sounds well, muffled or no,' said Will Niblett drowsily, as a fresh peal, after a brief silence, came trembling out of the belfry, singing and sighing upon the sunny air, now ringing clear in golden joyance, now echoing hollow and dim, then clear again, and

again overtaken by the murmurous moan of suppressed but inextinguishable regret.

‘’Tes like to make a loänesome young mäyde cry,’ murmured Seth Dore, letting the pipe fall from his mouth, as he rolled slowly over on his face, and went fast asleep in the oaken shade.

The muffled bells boomed on, changing from the clear golden peal and back to the hollow murmur; oak-leaves rustled softly over the sleeping mowers; flowers faded and grass dried in the long, cool, cut swathes, exhaling pungent fragrance; the uncut grass stood motionless, starred with blossom, awaiting the scythe. Then the bell music died on the palpitating air, the mowers awoke, the oaken shadows turned and lengthened, the day passed away in glories of molten gold.

Another day dawned and closed, and another; the blossomed wheatears set, and the ears plumped out and absorbed the sunlight till they too fell beneath the scythe, and deep peace of the mellow autumn-time lay upon meadow, wood, and sea.

Sunshine glowed warmly on the steep brown roofs of Swanbourne, and turned lichen-crustcd barns to beaten gold; it reddened fruit on orchard boughs, and opened wide the sweet hearts of late roses on the terrace; the sea was all soft blue bloom, except where it twinkled innumcrously in the sun's path; surf crawled drowsily at the foot of the cliffs, with low, contented murmurs, and hushed, scarce-audible song, the fierce tumult and seething wrath of many winters forgotten beneath the calm of faintly-hazed blue overhead; gleaners stooped in shining stubble-fields; belated waggons creaked under the last load home; robins sang cool mornings in and gorgeous evenings out in their peaceful, pathetic warble.

On the down at the base of which the sea crooned its hushed song, her face towards Swanbourne, Cynthia sat in her widow's weeds, absorbed in a widow's retrospect, as sat she once in the May-time in maiden white, lost in a girl's day-dream.

'Knowest thou not at the fall of the leaf
How the heart feels a languid grief?'

Rossetti wrote. But Cecil said it depended on temperament and mood, and made an answer thus :

‘ Full well I know at the fall of the leaf
The heart’s deep peace at rest from grief.’

Tears dropped upon the delicate white spirals of the ‘ lady’s tresses ’ in Cynthia’s hand, not bitter tears, for she was happier in her widowhood than in those years of estrangement, she was now truly at one with her husband, though a certain fleeting span of time and space was set between them.

Over there in the dim blue haze lay Cottesloe ; in the churchyard was a white cross with ‘ Renée ’ and the date of her death cut upon it among the Marlowes’ graves ; but Cecil lay here at Swaubourne among her own kindred. We sit in unconscious judgment on our dead, our best-beloved ; Minos is not more sternly just than mourners are in these unbidden musings and memories. Cynthia could not forget the never-redressed wrong she

had seen done Renée. How would it fare with Renée and Cecil in the resurrection?—that old perplexity—‘As the angels’?

She could never forget that the young lover who leapt into the charmed rose-garden of her maiden dreams was already bound to another woman. The inextinguishable sorrow of her life, Renée’s tragic end, and the little child’s wrong, which caused Cecil’s untimely grave, had never been if he had come under true colours that day.

Cynthia had with her a foreign letter dated on shipboard, and brought by a home-bound vessel spoken with from an outward-bound Australian steamer.

‘It is hard to be so far from you, my more than mother,’ Cicely wrote. ‘My husband is half jealous of you, and with reason. You saved me from what I dare not think of without trembling.’—For all her life long Cicely had a morbid horror of seeing a hat or cap pushed askew, because it recalled Mr. Sykes Simeon’s wig; the smell of hemp brought on nervous trem-

bling ; and she never wore a veil, or liked her eyes covered in play.—‘ Since our visit to Brittany, Valentine says that he understands what he calls my fierce loyalty and proud wilfulness, and he says it was just like a woman to let herself be killed on purpose to spite her husband. He is an angel. We have promised to visit Uncle K  rouac at St. Malo again some day. He thinks little Cecil like my mother, and will make him his heir.’

Cicely was herself an heiress in a small way, her father having, at Cynthia’s suggestion, bequeathed his patrimony and private means to her a year ago. She was going with her husband to make their home in New Zealand ; for a new country was necessary to one in her singular position. Cynthia was sorry to lose this new-found child ; she had done so much for her that she could not help loving her.

The sea crooned softly, bees hummed in sunny air, Cynthia’s thoughts floated back to the past. What if Cecil had not then come ? It seemed impossible to have lived

without him, yet her marriage had not been happy.

He left many diaries and commonplace books behind him ; by reading these she gained a fuller grasp of his character, and found that, in spite of blots, to know more was, as usual, to love more. Again and again she asked herself if this Cecil, her Cecil, could be the man who denied his wife so coolly and cruelly, and again and again she saw that the thing was almost forced upon him by the untenable position into which cowardice and falsehood had brought him. His one overpowering instinct had been to spare the woman he loved ; the same instinct led to the loss of his little girl. Tears sprang to her eyes when she remembered how deeply he had loved that one woman whom he yet made miserable. Through many such tears, dried and fresh springing and dried again, she read from the manuscripts before her.

There was much about the wrong of wanton assumption of parental responsibility and the wickedness of neglecting

offspring ; there were dissertations on the possibility of checking and punishing both. Flogging brutal parents was recommended, the difficulty of taking their children from them, and at the same time compelling them to bear the burden of their maintenance, discussed. ‘To launch human beings recklessly into an unprotected and uncherished existence is worse in its consequences than murder,’ one sentence ran.

‘Those old Greek myths,’ said another, ‘rose from the depths of human nature and the ever unriddled mysteries of the laws that move it. I have been driven by furies, like Orestes, to do what my better self would not, and, like Œdipus, I have wronged blindly where I would most fain have done right. Am I by nature weak, cruel and cowardly ? Yet thus I have acted, harming many, and especially her who is dearest to my soul. Man cannot guide himself. If he seek not the highest, he is ruled by Christian fiends and pagan furies.’

Thence she turned to a thin volume of

verse printed years after the 'Daffodil Songs,' chiefly sonnets, which, like Dante's in the 'Vita Nuova' and Sidney's to Stella, had but one theme, the beauty of one woman's soul and its shrine. Cecil's were written chiefly after marriage. A deep and pure passion breathed through these verses, the best he ever made, the perfume of his soul; she saw that his love for her had been the master passion of his life. Yet Renée loved him, and died of her love. Things happen that can never be set right.

Down there was the smoke of Bob Ryall's cottage, close to their gates. How clinging and close Bob's devotion to Cecil had been, and how well earned! Faint sounds of laughter and young voices came borne on the still air from Swanbourne, where the children were playing tennis. Lionel Luscombe was there, and the Harry Marlowes from Cottesloe, also a contingent of Forde-Cusacks. Thence Cynthia had stolen away; for the mirth jarred on the aching desolation of his widow-

hood. Lady Susan was looking on at the young ones' play, placid and beautiful in her old age. Her son Richard, still the popular bachelor Uncle Dick, stood near her, a general officer, covered with medals and scars. He, too, had loved one woman only, and though he neither married her nor made verses about her, she was his best friend, and his happiest moments were spent with her and her children.

From her elevation Cynthia could see Seagate lying around the cliff-locked bay ; a cluster of well-built cottages of different sizes and shapes, dotted about as if by chance amongst homely gardens and trees there, composed the Cecil Marlowe Homes for Children.

She saw a long, widowed, but not desolate, life stretching before her, for she was still young. Even in her widow's garb and widow's sorrow she gave an impression of youthfulness ; her eyes were even more beautiful and mysterious than in her girlhood ; she had no morbid desire to share his grave with the husband of her youth ; she

was at the age when intellect is ripest. She had leisure and influence; she was haunted, as in girlhood, by 'those others' who walked in the mire while she sat in jewels and velvets; she knew there was always 'another Cissie, a poor Cissie': might she attempt to solve, if only by daily consideration and instant and constant offering of sympathetic hands, the problem of lifting up 'those others' who sit in the dust?

While thus musing, she heard a man's quick, firm step—and her eldest son stepped into her widow's memories.

She rose and took the boy's arm, delighting in his strength and stature and honest, manly face. They looked across the broad, blue Channel to Brittany, hidden beyond the firm and level sea-rim, talking cheerfully, though Cynthia's heart was heavy with the feeling that part of her life, its greatest sorrow, must never be revealed—for Cicely's share in their father's life and death could only be partially explained—to Cecil's children. They turned

homewards, and the low croon of the surf grew softer, the tinkle of sheep-bells thinner, the laughter of the children playing in the sunshine clearer.

Cynthia's life was like a half-muffled peal : now the clear bell-melody rang out full and joyous, and now the covered side of the tongue boomed heavily, laden with inextinguishable regret ; then once more the golden peal dropped a clear bright shower of music into her heart. One day, perhaps, the muffled echo might cease.

THE END.

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